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A VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE PARTS.

VOL. II.

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A VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE PARTS.

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

PART II.

OF THE AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

PART III.

A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS.

By WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE.

THE THIRTEENTH EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PART II.

OF THE AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

Prophecy.

Isaiah, lii. 13. liii. "BEHOLD, my Servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men): so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them, shall they see; and that which they had not heard, shall they consider.—Who hath believed our report? and to which is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender

plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people, was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked

and with the rich in his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him ; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

These words are extant in a book, purporting to contain the predictions of a writer who lived seven centuries before the Christian æra.

That material part of every argument from prophecy, namely, that the words alleged were actually spoken or written

before the fact to which they are applied took place, or could by any natural means be foreseen, is, in the present instance, incontestable. The record comes out of the custody of adversaries. The Jews, as an ancient father well observed, are our librarians. The passage is in their copies, as well as in ours. With many attempts to explain it away, none has ever been made by them to discredit its authenticity.

And, what adds to the force of the quotation is, that it is taken from a writing *declaredly prophetic;* a writing, professing to describe such future transactions and changes in the world, as were connected with the fate and interests of the Jewish nation. It is not a passage in an historical or devotional composition, which, because it turns out to be applicable to some future events, or to some future situation of affairs, is presumed to have been oracular. The words of Isaiah were delivered by him in a prophetic character, with the solemnity belonging to that character: and what he so delivered, was all along understood by the Jewish reader to refer to something that

was to take place after the time of the author. The public sentiments of the Jews concerning the design of Isaiah's writings, are set forth in the book of Ecclesiasticus*: "He saw by an excellent spirit, what should come to pass at the last, and he comforted them that mourned in Sion. He showed what should come to pass for ever, and secret things or ever they came."

It is also an advantage which this prophecy possesses, that it is intermixed with no other subject. It is entire, separate, and uninterruptedly directed to one scene of things.

The *application* of the prophecy to the evangelic history is plain and appropriate. Here is no double sense; no figurative language, but what is sufficiently intelligible to every reader of every country. The obscurities (by which I mean the expressions that require a knowledge of local diction, and of local allusion) are few, and not of great importance. Nor have I found that varieties of reading, or a different constru-

* Chap. xlviii. ver. 24.

ing of the original, produce any material alteration in the sense of the prophecy. Compare the common translation with that of bishop Lowth, and the difference is not considerable. So far as they do differ, bishop Lowth's corrections, which are the faithful result of an accurate examination, bring the description nearer to the New Testament history than it was before. In the fourth verse of the fifty-third chapter, what our Bible renders "stricken," he translates "judicially stricken:" and in the eighth verse, the clause, "he was taken from prison and from judgement," the bishop gives, "by an oppressive judgement he was taken off." The next words to these, "who shall declare his generation?" are much cleared up in their meaning, by the bishop's version; "his manner of life who would declare?" *i. e.* who would stand forth in his defence? The former part of the ninth verse, "and he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death," which inverts the circumstances of Christ's passion, the bishop brings out in an order perfectly agreeable to the event; "and his grave was appointed with the wicked, but

with the rich man was his tomb." The words in the eleventh verse, "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," are, in the bishop's version, "by the *knowledge of him* shall my righteous servant justify many."

It is natural to inquire what turn the Jews themselves give to this prophecy*. There is good proof that the ancient Rabbins explained it of their expected Messiah†: but their modern expositors concur, I think, in representing it as a description of the calamitous state and intended restoration of the Jewish people, who are here, as they say, exhibited under the character of a single person. I have not discovered that their exposition rests upon any critical arguments, or upon these in any other than a very minute degree. The clause in the ninth verse, which we render "for the transgression of my people was he stricken,"

* "Vaticinium hoc Esaiæ est carnificina Rabbinorum, de quo aliqui Judæi mihi confessi sunt, Rabbinos suos ex propheticis scripturis facilè se extricare potuisse, *modò Esaias tacuisset*." Hulse, Theol. Jud. p. 318, quoted by Poole, in loc.

† Hulse, Theol. Jud. p. 430.

and in the margin, "was the stroke upon him," the Jews read "for the transgression of my people was the stroke upon *them*." And what they allege in support of the alteration amounts only to this, that the Hebrew pronoun is capable of a plural, as well as of a singular signification; that is to say, is capable of their construction as well as ours*. And this is all the varia-

* Bishop Lowth adopts in this place the reading of the Seventy, which gives smitten *to death*, "for the transgression of my people was he smitten to death." The addition of the words "to death," makes an end of the Jewish interpretation of the clause. And the authority, upon which this reading (though not given by the present Hebrew text) is adopted, Dr. Kennicot has set forth by an argument not only so cogent, but so clear and popular, that I beg leave to transcribe the substance of it into this note:— "Origen, after having quoted at large this prophecy concerning the Messiah, tells us, that, having once made use of this passage, in a dispute against some that were accounted wise among the Jews, one of them replied that the words did not mean one man, but one people, the Jews, who were smitten of God, and dispersed among the Gentiles for their conversion; that he then urged many parts of this prophecy, to show the absurdity of this interpretation, and that he seemed to press them the hardest by this sentence,—'for the transgression of my people was he smitten to death.' Now as Origen, the author of the Hexapla, must have understood Hebrew, we cannot suppose that he would have urged this last text as so decisive, if the Greek version had not agreed here with the Hebrew text; nor that these wise Jews

tion contended for; the rest of the prophecy they read as we do. The probability, therefore, of their exposition, is a subject of which we are as capable of judging as themselves. This judgement is open indeed to the good sense of every attentive reader. The application which the Jews contend for, appears to me to labour under insuperable difficulties; in particular, it may be demanded of them to explain, in *whose* name or person, if the Jewish people be the sufferer, does the prophet

would have been at all distressed by this quotation, unless the Hebrew text had read agreeably to the words "to death," on which the argument principally depended; for, by quoting it immediately, they would have triumphed over him, and reprobated his Greek version. This, whenever they could do it, was their constant practice in their disputes with the Christians. Origen himself, who laboriously compared the Hebrew text with the Septuagint, has recorded the necessity of arguing with the Jews, from such passages only, as were in the Septuagint agreeable to the Hebrew. Wherefore, as Origen had carefully compared the Greek version of the Septuagint with the Hebrew text; and as he puzzled and confounded the learned Jews, by urging upon them the reading "to death" in this place; it seems almost impossible not to conclude, both from Origen's argument, and the silence of his Jewish adversaries, that the Hebrew text at that time actually had the word agreeably to the version of the Seventy." Lowth's Isaiah. p. 242.

speak, when he says, "He hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows, yet *we* did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; but he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities, the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him, and with his stripes *we* are healed." Again, the description in the seventh verse, "he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth," quadrates with no part of the Jewish history with which we are acquainted. The mention of the "grave," and the "tomb," in the ninth verse, is not very applicable to the fortunes of a nation; and still less so is the conclusion of the prophecy in the twelfth verse, which expressly represents the sufferings as *voluntary*, and the sufferer as interceding for the offenders; "because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

There are other prophecies of the Old Testament, interpreted by Christians to relate to the Gospel history, which are deserving both of great regard, and of a very attentive consideration: but I content myself with stating the above, as well because I think it the clearest and the strongest of all, as because most of the rest, in order that their value might be represented with any tolerable degree of fidelity, require a discussion unsuitable to the limits and nature of this work. The reader will find them disposed in order, and distinctly explained, in bishop Chandler's treatise on the subject: and he will bear in mind, what has been often, and, I think, truly, urged by the advocates of Christianity, that there is no other eminent person, to the history of whose life so many circumstances can be made to apply. They who object that much has been done by the power of chance, the ingenuity of accommodation, and the industry of research, ought to try whether the same, or any thing like it, could be done, if Mahomet, or any other person, were proposed as the subject of Jewish prophecy.

II. A second head of argument from prophecy, is founded upon our Lord's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, recorded by three out of the four evangelists.

Luke, xxi. 5—25. "And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by-and-by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and

pestilences; and fearful sights, and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before, what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written

may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

In terms nearly similar, this discourse is related in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, and the thirteenth of Mark. The prospect of the same evils drew from our Saviour, on another occasion, the following affecting expressions of concern, which are preserved by Saint Luke (xix. 41—44.): "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children

within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."—These passages are direct and explicit predictions. References to the same event, some plain, some parabolical, or otherwise figurative, are found in divers other discourses of our Lord *.

The general agreement of the description with the event, viz. with the ruin of the Jewish nation, and the capture of Jerusalem under Vespasian, thirty-six years after Christ's death, is most evident; and the accordancy in various articles of detail and circumstance has been shown by many learned writers. It is also an advantage to the inquiry, and to the argument built upon it, that we have received a copious account of the transaction from Josephus, a Jewish and contemporary historian. This part of the case is perfectly free from doubt. The only question which, in my opinion, can be raised upon the subject, is, whether the prophecy was really delivered *before*

* Mat. xxi. 33—46. xxii. 1—7. Mark. xii. 1—12. Luke. xiii. 1—9. xx. 9—20. xxi. 5—13.

the event; I shall apply, therefore, my observations to this point solely.

1. The judgement of antiquity, though varying in the precise year of the publication of the three Gospels, *concurs* in assigning them a date prior to the destruction of Jerusalem *.

2. This judgement is confirmed by a strong probability arising from the course of human life. The destruction of Jerusalem took place in the seventieth year after the birth of Christ. The three evangelists, one of whom was his immediate companion, and the other two associated with his companions, were, it is probable, not much younger than he was. They must, consequently, have been far advanced in life when Jerusalem was taken: and no reason has been given why they should defer writing their histories so long.

3. † If the evangelists, at the time of writing the Gospels, had known of the

* Lardner, vol. xiii.

† Le Clerc, Diss. III. de Quat. Evang. num. vii. p. 541.

destruction of Jerusalem, by which catastrophe the prophecies were plainly fulfilled, it is most probable, that, in recording the predictions, they would have dropped some word or other about the completion; in like manner as Luke, after relating the denunciation of a dearth by Agabus, adds, "which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar*:" whereas the prophecies are given distinctly in one chapter of each of the first three Gospels, and referred to in several different passages of each, and, in none of all these places, does there appear the smallest intimation that the things spoken of had come to pass. I do admit, that it would have been the part of an impostor, who wished his readers to believe that his book was written before the event, when in truth it was written after it, to have suppressed any such intimation carefully. But this was not the character of the authors of the Gospel. Cunning was no quality of theirs. Of all writers in the world, they thought the least of providing against objections. Moreover, there is no

* Acts, xi. 28.

clause in any one of them, that makes a profession of their having written prior to the Jewish wars, which a fraudulent purpose would have led them to pretend. They have done neither one thing nor the other: they have neither inserted any words, which might signify to the reader that their accounts were written *before* the destruction of Jerusalem, which a sophist would have done; nor have they dropped a hint of the completion of the prophecies recorded by them, which an *undesigning* writer, writing *after* the event, could hardly, on some or other of the many occasions that presented themselves, have missed of doing.

4. The admonitions* which Christ is represented to have given to his followers

* "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh; then let them which are in Judea, flee to the mountains; then let them which are in the midst of it depart out, and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto." Luke, xxi. 20, 21.

"When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains; let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." Matt. xiv. 18.

to save themselves by flight, are not easily accounted for, on the supposition of the prophecy being fabricated after the event. Either the Christians, when the siege approached, did make their escape from Jerusalem, or they did not: if they did, they must have had the prophecy amongst them: if they did not know of any such prediction at the time of the siege, if they did not take notice of any such warning, it was an improbable fiction, in a writer publishing his work near to that time (which, on any even the lowest and most disadvantageous supposition, was the case with the Gospels now in our hands), and addressing his work to Jews and to Jewish converts (which Matthew certainly did), to state that the followers of Christ had received admonition, of which they made no use when the occasion arrived, and of which experience then recent proved, that those, who were most concerned to know and regard them, were ignorant or negligent. Even if the prophecies came to the hands of the evangelists through no better vehicle than tradition, it must have been by a tradition which subsisted prior to the

event. And to suppose that, without any authority whatever, without so much as even any tradition to guide them, they had forged these passages, is to impute to them a degree of fraud and imposture, from every appearance of which their compositions are as far removed as possible.

5. I think that, if the prophecies had been composed after the event, there would have been more specification. The names or descriptions of the enemy, the general, the emperor, would have been found in them. The designation of the time would have been more determinate. And I am fortified in this opinion by observing, that the counterfeited prophecies of the Sibylline oracles, of the twelve patriarchs, and I am inclined to believe, most others of the kind, are mere transcripts of the history, moulded into a prophetic form.

It is objected, that the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is mixed, or connected, with expressions which relate to the final judgement of the world; and so connected, as to lead an ordinary reader

to expect, that these two events would not be far distant from each other. To which I answer, that the objection does not concern our present argument. If our Saviour actually foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, it is sufficient; even although we should allow, that the narration of the prophecy had combined what had been said by him on kindred subjects, without accurately preserving the order, or always noticing the transition of the discourse.

CHAPTER II.

The morality of the Gospel.

In stating the morality of the Gospel as an argument of its truth, I am willing to admit two points; first, that the teaching of morality was not the primary design of the mission; secondly, that morality, neither in the Gospel, nor in any other book, can be a subject, properly speaking, of discovery.

If I were to describe in a very few words the scope of Christianity, as a *revelation* *,

* Great and inestimably beneficial effects may accrue from the mission of Christ, and especially from his death, which do not belong to Christianity as a *revelation;* that is, they might have existed, and they might have been accomplished, though we had never, in this life, been made acquainted with them. These effects may be very extensive; they may be

I should say, that it was to influence the conduct of human life, by establishing the proof of a future state of reward and punishment,—" to bring life and immortality to light." The direct object, therefore, of the design is, to supply motives, and not rules; sanctions, and not precepts. And these were what mankind stood most in need of. The members of civilized society can, in all ordinary cases, judge tolerably well how they ought to act: but without a future state, or, which is the same thing, without credited evidence of that state, they want a *motive* to their duty; they want at least strength of motive, sufficient to bear up against the force of passion, and the temptation of present advantage. Their

interesting even to other orders of intelligent beings. I think it is a general opinion, and one to which I have long come, that the beneficial effects of Christ's death extend to the whole human species. It was the redemption of *the world.* "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world;" 1 John, ii. 2. Probably the future happiness, perhaps the future existence of the species, and more gracious terms of acceptance extended *to all*, might depend upon it, or be procured by it. Now these effects, whatever they be, do not belong to Christianity as a *revelation;* because they exist with respect to those to whom *it is not revealed.*

rules want authority. The most important service that can be rendered to human life, and that consequently, which, one might expect beforehand, would be the great end and office of a revelation from God, is to convey to the world authorized assurances of the reality of a future existence. And although in doing this, or by the ministry of the same person by whom this is done, moral precepts or examples, or illustrations of moral precepts, may be occasionally given, and be highly valuable, yet still they do not form the original purpose of the mission.

Secondly; morality, neither in the Gospel, nor in any other book, can be a subject of discovery, properly so called. By which proposition, I mean that there cannot, in morality, be any thing similar to what are called discoveries in natural philosophy, in the arts of life, and in some sciences; as the system of the universe, the circulation of the blood, the polarity of the magnet, the laws of gravitation, alphabetical writing, decimal arithmetic, and some other things of the same sort; facts, or proofs,

or contrivances, before totally unknown and unthought of. Whoever, therefore, expects, in reading the New Testament, to be struck with discoveries in morals in the manner in which his mind was affected when he first came to the knowledge of the discoveries above mentioned; or rather in the manner in which the world was affected by them, when they were first published; expects what, as I apprehend, the nature of the subject renders it impossible that he should meet with. And the foundation of my opinion is this, that the qualities of actions depend entirely upon their effects, which effects must all along have been the subject of human experience.

When it is once settled, no matter upon what principle, that to do good is virtue, the rest is calculation. But since the calculation cannot be instituted concerning each particular action, we establish intermediate rules; by which proceeding, the business of morality is much facilitated, for then it is concerning our rules alone that we need inquire, whether in their tendency they be beneficial; concerning our actions, we have

only to ask, whether they be agreeable to the rules. We refer actions to rules, and rules to public happiness. Now, in the formation of these rules, there is no place for discovery, properly so called, but there is ample room for the exercise of wisdom, judgement, and prudence.

As I wish to deliver argument rather than panegyric, I shall treat of the morality of the Gospel, in subjection to these observations. And after all, I think it such a morality, as, considering from whom it came, is most extraordinary; and such as, without allowing some degree of reality to the character and pretensions of the religion, it is difficult to account for: or, to place the argument a little lower in the scale, it is such a morality as completely repels the supposition of its being the tradition of a barbarous age or of a barbarous people, of the religion being founded in folly, or of its being the production of craft; and it repels also, in a great degree, the supposition of its having been the effusion of an enthusiastic mind.

The division, under which the subject may be most conveniently treated, is that of the things taught, and the manner of teaching.

Under the first head, I should willingly, if the limits and nature of my work admitted of it, transcribe into this chapter the whole of what has been said upon the morality of the Gospel, by the author of *The Internal Evidence of Christianity;* because it perfectly agrees with my own opinion, and because it is impossible to say the same things so well. This acute observer of human nature, and, as I believe, sincere convert to Christianity, appears to me to have made out satisfactorily the two following positions, viz.

I. That the Gospel omits some qualities, which have usually engaged the praises and admiration of mankind, but which, in reality, and in their general effects, have been prejudicial to human happiness.

II. That the Gospel has brought forwards some virtues, which possess the highest in-

trinsic value, but which have commonly been overlooked and contemned.

The first of these propositions he exemplifies in the instances of friendship, patriotism, active courage; in the sense in which these qualities are usually understood, and in the conduct which they often produce.

The second, in the instances of passive courage or endurance of sufferings, patience under affronts and injuries, humility, irresistance, placability.

The truth is, there are two opposite descriptions of character, under which mankind may generally be classed. The one possesses vigour, firmness, resolution; is daring and active, quick in its sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible in its purpose, violent in its resentments.

The other, meek, yielding, complying, forgiving; not prompt to act, but willing to suffer; silent and gentle under rudeness and insult, suing for reconciliation where others

would demand satisfaction, giving way to the pushes of impudence, conceding and indulgent to the prejudices, the wrong-headedness, the intractability of those with whom it has to deal.

The former of these characters is, and ever hath been, the favourite of the world. It is the character of great men. There is a dignity in it which universally commands respect.

The latter is poor-spirited, tame, and abject. Yet so it hath happened, that, with the Founder of Christianity, this latter is the subject of his commendation, his precepts, his example; and that the former is so, in no part of its composition. This and nothing else, is the character designed in the following remarkable passages: "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also: and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also: and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain: love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do

good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." This certainly is not common-place morality. It is very original. It shows at least (and it is for this purpose we produce it) that no two things can be more different than the Heroic and the Christian character.

Now the author, to whom I refer, has not only marked this difference more strongly than any preceding writer, but has proved, in contradiction to first impressions, to popular opinion, to the encomiums of orators and poets, and even to the suffrages of historians and moralists, that the latter character possesses the most of true worth both as being most difficult either to be acquired or sustained, and as contributing most to the happiness and tranquillity of social life. The state of his argument is as follows:

I. If this disposition were universal, the case is clear; the world would be a society of friends. Whereas, if the other disposition were universal, it would produce a

scene of universal contention. The world could not hold a generation of such men.

II. If, what is the fact, the disposition be partial; if a few be actuated by it, amongst a multitude who are not; in whatever degree it does prevail, in the same proportion it prevents, allays, and terminates quarrels, the great disturbers of human happiness, and the great sources of human misery, so far as man's happiness and misery depend upon man. Without this disposition, enmities must not only be frequent, but, once begun, must be eternal: for, each retaliation being a fresh injury, and, consequently, requiring a fresh *satisfaction*, no period can be assigned to the reciprocation of affronts, and to the progress of hatred, but that which closes the lives, or at least the intercourse, of the parties.

I would only add to these observations, that although the former of the two characters above described may be occasionally useful; although, perhaps, a great general, or a great statesman, may be formed by it, and these may be instru-

ments of important benefits to mankind, yet is this nothing more than what is true of many qualities, which are acknowledged to be vicious. *Envy* is a quality of this sort; I know not a stronger stimulus to exertion; many a scholar, many an artist, many a soldier, has been produced by it; nevertheless, since in its general effects it is noxious, it is properly condemned, certainly is not praised, by sober moralists.

It was a portion of the same character as that we are defending, or rather of his love of the same character, which our Saviour displayed, in his repeated correction of the ambition of his disciples; his frequent admonitions, that greatness with them was to consist in humility; his censure of that love of distinction, and greediness of superiority, which the chief persons amongst his countrymen were wont, on all occasions, great and little, to betray. "They (the Scribes and Pharisees) love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings, in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your

Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren: and call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father, which is in heaven; neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ; but he that is greatest among *you*, shall be your servant: and whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted *." I make no further remark upon these passages (because they are, in truth, only a repetition of the doctrine, different expressions of the principle, which we have already stated), except that some of the passages, especially our Lord's advice to the guests at an entertainment †, seem to extend the rule to what we call *manners;* which was both regular in point of consistency, and not so much beneath the dignity of our Lord's mission, as may at first sight be supposed, for bad manners are bad morals.

It is sufficiently apparent, that the pre-

* Matt. xxiii. 6. See also Mark, xii. 39. Luke, xx. 46.; xiv. 7.

† Luke, xiv. 7.

cepts we have cited, or rather the disposition which these precepts inculcate, relate to personal conduct from personal motives; to cases in which men act from impulse, for themselves, and from themselves. When it comes to be considered, what is necessary to be done for the sake of the public, and out of a regard to the general welfare (which consideration, for the most part, ought exclusively to govern the duties of men in public stations), it comes to a case to which the rules do not belong. This distinction is plain; and if it were less so, the consequence would not be much felt: for, it is very seldom that, in the intercourse of private life, men act with public views. The personal motives, from which they do act, the rule regulates.

The preference of the patient to the heroic character, which we have here noticed, and which the reader will find explained at large in the work to which we have referred him, is a peculiarity in the Christian institution, which I propose as an argument of wisdom very much beyond the

situation and natural character of the person who delivered it.

II. A *second* argument, drawn from the morality of the New Testament, is the stress which is laid by our Saviour upon the regulation of the thoughts. And I place this consideration next to the other, because they are connected. The other related to the malicious passions; this, to the voluptuous. Together, they comprehend the whole character.

"Out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications," &c.—"These are the things which defile a man*."

"Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but *within* they are full of extortion and excess.—Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness; even so ye also outwardly

* Matt. xv. 19.

appear righteous unto men, but *within* ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*."

And more particularly that strong expression†, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

There can be no doubt with any reflecting mind, but that the propensities of our nature must be subject to regulation; but the question is, *where* the check ought to be placed, upon the thought, or only upon the action? In this question, our Saviour, in the texts here quoted, has pronounced a decisive judgement. He makes the control of thought essential. Internal purity with him is every thing. Now I contend that this is the only discipline which can succeed; in other words, that a moral system, which prohibits actions, but leaves the thoughts at liberty, will be ineffectual, and is therefore unwise. I know not how to go about the proof of a point, which depends upon experience, and upon a

* Matt. xxiii. 25. 27 † Ib. v. 28.

knowledge of the human constitution, better than by citing the judgement of persons, who appear to have given great attention to the subject, and to be well qualified to form a true opinion about it. Boerhaave, speaking of this very declaration of our Saviour, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart," and understanding it, as we do, to contain an injunction to lay the check upon the thoughts, was wont to say, that, "our Saviour knew mankind better than Socrates." Haller, who has recorded this saying of Boerhaave, adds to it the following remarks of his own*: "It did not escape the observation of our Saviour, that the rejection of any evil thoughts was the best defence against vice: for when a debauched person fills his imagination with impure pictures, the licentious ideas which he recalls, fail not to stimulate his desires with a degree of violence which he cannot resist. This will be followed by gratification, unless some external obstacle should prevent him from

* Letters to his Daughter.

the commission of a sin, which he had internally resolved on." "Every moment of time," says our author, "that is spent in meditations upon sin, increases the power of the dangerous object which has possessed our imagination." I suppose these reflections will be generally assented to.

III. Thirdly, had a teacher of morality been asked concerning a general principle of conduct, and for a short rule of life; and had he instructed the person who consulted him, "constantly to refer his actions to what he believed to be the will of his Creator, and constantly to have in view not his own interest and gratification alone, but the happiness and comfort of those about him," he would have been thought, I doubt not, in any age of the world, and in any, even the most improved, state of morals, to have delivered a judicious answer; because, by the first direction, he suggested the only motive which acts steadily and uniformly, in sight and out of sight, in familiar occurrences and under pressing temptations; and in the second, he corrected, what, of all tendencies in the

human character, stands most in need of correction, *selfishness*, or a contempt of other men's conveniency and satisfaction. In estimating the value of a moral rule, we are to have regard not only to the particular duty, but the general spirit; not only to what it directs us to do, but to the character which a compliance with its direction is likely to form in us. So, in the present instance, the rule here recited will never fail to make him who obeys it *considerate*, not only of the rights, but of the feelings of other men, bodily and mental, in great matters and in small; of the ease, the accommodation, the self-complacency, of all with whom he has any concern, especially of all who are in his power, or dependent upon his will.

Now what, in the most applauded philosopher of the most enlightened age of the world, would have been deemed worthy of his wisdom, and of his character, to say, our Saviour hath said, and upon just such an occasion as that which we have feigned.

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer,

asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*."

The second precept occurs in Saint Matthew (xix. 16.) on another occasion similar to this; and both of them, on a third similar occasion, in Luke (x. 27). In these two latter instances, the question proposed was, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Upon all these occasions, I consider the words of our Saviour as expressing precisely the same thing as what I have put into the mouth of the moral philosopher. Nor do I think that it detracts much from the merit of the answer, that these pre-

* Matt. xxii. 35—40.

cepts are extant in the Mosaic code; for his laying his finger, if I may so say, upon these precepts; his drawing them out from the rest of that voluminous institution; his stating of them, not simply amongst the number, but as the greatest and the sum of all the others; in a word, his proposing of them to his hearers for their rule and principle, was our Saviour's own.

And what our Saviour had said upon the subject, appears to me to have *fixed* the sentiment amongst his followers.

Saint Paul has it expressly, "If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*;" and again, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself†."

Saint John, in like manner, "This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also‡."

* Rom. xiii. 9. † Gal. v. 14. ‡ 1 John, iv. 21.

Saint Peter, not very differently: "Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*."

And it is so well known, as to require no citations to verify it, that this love, or charity, or, in other words, regard to the welfare of others, runs in various forms through all the preceptive parts of the apostolic writings. It is the theme of all their exhortations, that with which their morality begins and ends, from which all their details and enumerations set out, and into which they return.

And that this temper, for some time at least, descended in its purity to succeeding Christians, is attested by one of the earliest and best of the remaining writings of the apostolical fathers, the epistle of the Roman Clement. The meekness of the Christian character reigns throughout the whole

* 1 Peter, i. 22.

of that excellent piece. The occasion called for it. It was to compose the dissensions of the church of Corinth. And the venerable hearer of the apostles does not fall short, in the display of this principle, of the finest passages of their writings. He calls to the remembrance of the Corinthian church its former character, in which "ye were all of you," he tells them, "humble-minded, not boasting of any thing, desiring rather to be subject than to govern, to give than to receive, being content with the portion God had dispensed to you, and hearkening diligently to his word; ye were enlarged in your bowels, having his sufferings always before your eyes. Ye contended day and night for the whole brotherhood, that with compassion and a good conscience the number of his elect might be saved. Ye were sincere, and without offence, towards each other. Ye bewailed every one his neighbour's sins, esteeming their defects your own*." His prayer for them was for the "return of peace, long-suffering, and

* Ep. Clem. Rom. c. 2.; Abp. Wake's Translation.

patience*." And his advice to those, who might have been the occasion of difference in the society, is conceived in the true spirit, and with a perfect knowledge, of the Christian character: "Who is there among you that is generous? who that is compassionate? who that has any charity? Let him say, If this sedition, this contention, and these schisms, be upon my account, I am ready to depart, to go away whithersoever ye please, and do whatsoever ye shall command me; only let the flock of Christ be in peace with the elders who are set over it. He that shall do this, shall get to himself a very great honour in the Lord; and there is no place but what will be ready to receive him; for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. These things they, who have their conversation towards God, not to be repented of, both have done, and will always be ready to do†."

This sacred principle, this earnest recommendation of forbearance, lenity, and

* Ep. Clem. Rom. c. 53.; Abp. Wake's Translation.

† Ib. c. 54.

forgiveness, mixes with all the writings of that age. There are more quotations in the apostolical fathers, of texts which relate to these points, than of any other. Christ's sayings had struck them. "Not rendering," said Polycarp, the disciple of John, "evil for evil, or railing for railing, or striking for striking, or cursing for cursing*." Again, speaking of some, whose behaviour had given great offence, "Be ye moderate," says he, "on this occasion, and look not upon such as enemies, but call them back as suffering and erring members, that ye save your whole body†."

"Be ye mild at their anger," saith Ignatius, the companion of Polycarp, "humble at their boastings, to their blasphemies return your prayers, to their error your firmness in the faith; when they are cruel, be ye gentle; not endeavouring to imitate their ways, let us be their brethren in all kindness and moderation: but let us be followers of the Lord; for who was ever

* Pol. Ep. ad Phil. c. 2. † Ib. c. 11.

more unjustly used, more destitute, more despised?"

IV. A fourth quality, by which the morality of the Gospel is distinguished, is the exclusion of regard to fame and reputation.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven*."

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly†."

And the rule, by parity of reason, is extended to all other virtues.

I do not think, that either in these, ro in any other passage of the New Testa-

* Matt. vi. 1. † Ibid. 6.

ment, the pursuit of fame is stated as a vice; it is only said that an action, to be virtuous, must be independent of it. I would also observe, that it is not publicity, but ostentation, which is prohibited; not the mode, but the motive, of the action, which is regulated. A good man will prefer that mode, as well as those objects of his beneficence, by which he can produce the greatest effect; and the view of this purpose may dictate sometimes publication, and sometimes concealment. Either the one or the other may be the *mode* of the action, according as the end to be promoted by it appears to require. But from the *motive*, the reputation of the deed, and the fruits and advantage of that reputation to ourselves, must be shut out, or, in whatever proportion they are not so, the action in that proportion fails of being virtuous.

This exclusion of regard to human opinion, is a difference, not so much in the duties, to which the teachers of virtue would persuade mankind, as in the manner

and topics of persuasion. And in this view the difference is great. When *we* set about to give advice, our lectures are full of the advantages of character, of the regard that is due to appearances and to opinion; of what the world, especially of what the good or great, will think and say: of the value of public esteem, and of the qualities by which men acquire it. Widely different from this was our Saviour's instruction; and the difference was founded upon the best reasons. For, however the care of reputation, the authority of public opinion, or even of the opinion of good men, the satisfaction of being well received and well thought of, the benefit of being known and distinguished, are topics to which we are fain to have recourse in our exhortations; the true virtue is that which discards these considerations absolutely, and which retires from them all to the single internal purpose of pleasing God. This at least was the virtue which our Saviour taught. And in teaching this, he not only confined the views of his followers to the proper measure and principle of human

duty, but acted in consistency with his office as a monitor from heaven.

Next to what our Saviour taught, may be considered the manner of his teaching; which was extremely peculiar, yet, I think, precisely adapted to the peculiarity of his character and situation. His lessons did not consist of disquisitions; of any thing like moral essays, or like sermons, or like set treatises upon the several points which he mentioned. When he delivered a precept, it was seldom that he added any proof or argument; still more seldom, that he accompanied it with, what all precepts require, limitations and distinctions. His instructions were conceived in short, emphatic, sententious rules, in occasional reflections, or in round maxims. I do not think that this was a natural, or would have been a proper method for a philosopher or a moralist; or that it is a method which can be successfully imitated by us. But I contend that it was suitable to the character which Christ assumed, and to the situation

in which, as a teacher, he was placed. He produced himself as a messenger from God. He put the truth of what he taught upon authority*. In the choice, therefore, of his mode of teaching, the purpose by him to be consulted was *impression*: because conviction, which forms the principal end of our discourses, was to arise in the minds of his followers, from a different source, from their respect to his person and authority. Now, for the purpose of impression singly and exclusively (I repeat again, that we are not here to consider the convincing of the understanding), I know nothing which would have so great force as strong ponderous maxims, frequently urged, and frequently brought back to the thoughts of the hearers. I know nothing that could in this view be said better, than "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you:" "The first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt

* *I* say unto you, Swear not at all; *I* say unto you, Resist not evil; . say untoyou, Love your enemies†.

† Mat. v. 34, 39, 44.

love thy neighbour as thyself." It must also be remembered, that our Lord's ministry, upon the supposition either of one year or three, compared with his work, was of short duration; that, within this time, he had many places to visit, various audiences to address; that his person was generally besieged by crowds of followers: that he was, sometimes, driven away from the place where he was teaching by persecution, and at other times, thought fit to withdraw himself from the commotions of the populace. Under these circumstances, nothing appears to have been so practicable, or likely to be so efficacious, as leaving, wherever he came, concise lessons of duty. These circumstances at least show the necessity he was under of comprising what he delivered within a small compass. In particular, his sermon upon the mount ought always to be considered with a view to these observations. The question is not, whether a fuller, a more accurate, a more systematic, or a more argumentative discourse upon morals might not have been pronounced; but whether more could have been said in the same room, better adapted

to the exigences of the hearers, or better calculated for the purpose of impression? Seen in this light, it has always appeared to me to be admirable. Dr. Lardner thought that this discourse was made up of what Christ had said at different times, and on different occasions, several of which occasions are noticed in Saint Luke's narrative. I can perceive no reason for this opinion. I believe that our Lord delivered this discourse at one time and place, in the manner related by Saint Matthew, and that he repeated the same rules and maxims at different times, as opportunity or occasion suggested; that they were often in his mouth, and were repeated to different audiences, and in various conversations.

It is incidental to this mode of moral instruction, which proceeds not by proof but upon authority, not by disquisition but by precept, that the rules will be conceived in absolute terms, leaving the application, and the distinctions that attend it, to the reason of the hearer. It is likewise to be expected that they will be delivered in terms by so much the more forcible and

energetic, as they have to encounter natural or general propensities. It is further also to be remarked, that many of those strong instances, which appear in our Lord's sermon, such as, "If any man will smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also:" "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also:" "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain:" though they appear in the form of specific precepts, are intended as descriptive of disposition and character. A specific compliance with the precepts would be of little value, but the disposition which they inculcate is of the highest. He who should content himself with waiting for the occasion, and with literally observing the rule when the occasion offered, would do nothing, or worse than nothing: but he who considers the character and disposition which is hereby inculcated, and places that disposition before him as the model to which he should bring his own, takes, perhaps, the best possible method of improving the benevolence, and of calming and rectifying the vices, of his temper.

If it be said that this disposition is unattainable, I answer, so is all perfection: ought therefore a moralist to recommend imperfections? One excellency, however, of our Saviour's rules, is, that they are either never mistaken, or never so mistaken as to do harm. I could feign a hundred cases, in which the literal application of the rule, "of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us," might mislead us: but I never yet met with the man who was actually misled by it. Notwithstanding that our Lord bade his followers, "not to resist evil," and "to forgive the enemy who should trespass against them, not till seven times, but till seventy times seven," the Christian world has hitherto suffered little by too much placability or forbearance. I would repeat once more, what has already been twice remarked, that these rules were designed to regulate personal conduct from personal motives, and for this purpose alone.

I think that these observations will assist us greatly in placing our Saviour's conduct, as a moral teacher, in a proper point of

view; especially when it is considered, that to deliver moral disquisitions was no part of his design,—to teach morality at all was only a subordinate part of it; his great business being to supply, what was much more wanting than lessons of morality, stronger moral sanctions, and clearer assurances of a future judgement*.

The *parables* of the New Testament are, many of them, such as would have done honour to any book in the world: I do not mean in style and diction, but in the choice

* Some appear to require a religious system, or, in the books which profess to deliver that system, minute directions for every case and occurrence that may arise. This, say they, is necessary, to render a revelation perfect, especially one which has for its object the regulation of human conduct. Now, how prolix, and yet how incomplete and unavailing, such an attempt must have been, is proved by one notable example: "The Indoo and Mussulman religion are institutes of civil law, regulating the minutest questions both of property, and of all questions which come under the cognizance of the magistrate. And to what length details of this kind are necessarily carried, when once begun, may be understood from an anecdote of the Mussulman code, which we have received from the most respectable authority, that not less than *seventy-five thousand* traditional precepts have been promulgated." (Hamilton's Translation of the Hedaya, or Guide.)

of the subjects, in the structure of the narratives, in the aptness, propriety, and force of the circumstances woven into them; and in some, as that of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee and the Publican, in an union of pathos and simplicity, which, in the best productions of human genius, is the fruit only of a much exercised, and well-cultivated judgement.

The Lord's Prayer, for a succession of solemn thoughts, for fixing the attention upon a few great points, for suitableness to every condition, for sufficiency, for conciseness without obscurity, for the weight and real importance of its petitions, is without an equal or a rival.

From whence did these come? Whence had this man his wisdom? Was our Saviour, in fact, a well-instructed philosopher, whilst he is represented to us as an illiterate peasant? Or shall we say that some early Christians of taste and education composed these pieces and ascribed them to Christ? Beside all other incredibilities

in this account, I answer, with Dr. Jortin, that they *could not* do it. No specimens of composition, which the Christians of the first century have left us, authorize us to believe that they were equal to the task. And how little qualified the Jews, the countrymen and companions of Christ, were to assist him in the undertaking, may be judged of from the traditions and writings of theirs which were the nearest to that age. The whole collection of the Talmud is one continued proof, into what follies they fell whenever they left their Bible; and how little capable they were of furnishing out such lessons as Christ delivered.

But there is still another view, in which our Lord's discourses deserve to be considered; and that is, in their *negative* character,—not in what they did, but in what they did not, contain. Under this head, the following reflections appear to me to possess some weight.

1. They exhibit no particular description of the invisible world. The future hap-

piness of the good, and the misery of the bad, which is all we want to be assured of, is directly and positively affirmed, and is represented by metaphors and comparisons, which were plainly intended as metaphors and comparisons, and as nothing more. As to the rest, a solemn reserve is maintained. The question concerning the woman who had been married to seven brothers, "Whose shall she be on the resurrection?" was of a nature calculated to have drawn from Christ a more circumstantial account of the state of the human species in their future existence. He cut short, however, the inquiry by an answer, which at once rebuked intruding curiosity, and was agreeable to the best apprehensions we are able to form upon the subject, viz. "That they who are accounted worthy of that resurrection, shall be as the angels of God in heaven." I lay a stress upon this reserve, because it repels the suspicion of enthusiasm: for enthusiasm is wont to expatiate upon the condition of the departed, above all other subjects; and with a wild particularity. It is moreover a topic which is always listened to with greediness. The teacher, therefore,

whose principal purpose is to draw upon himself attention, is sure to be full of it. The Koran of Mahomet is half made up of it.

II. Our Lord enjoined no austerities. He not only enjoined none as absolute duties, but he recommended none as carrying men to a higher degree of Divine favour. Place Christianity, in this respect, by the side of all institutions which have been founded in the fanaticism, either of their author, or of his first followers: or rather compare, in this respect, Christianity as it came from Christ, with the same religion after it fell into other hands; with the extravagant merit very soon ascribed to celibacy, solitude, voluntary poverty; with the rigours of an ascetic, and the vows of a monastic life; the hair shirt, the watchings, the midnight prayers, the obmutescence, the gloom and mortification of religious orders, and of those who aspired to religious perfection.

III. Our Saviour uttered no impassioned devotion. There was no heat in his piety,

or in the language in which he expressed it; no vehement or rapturous ejaculations, no violent urgency, in his prayers. The Lord's Prayer is a model of calm devotion. His words in the garden are unaffected expressions, of a deep indeed, but sober piety. He never appears to have been worked up into any thing like that elation, or that emotion of spirits, which is occasionally observed in most of those, to whom the name of enthusiast can in any degree be applied. I feel a respect for Methodists, because I believe that there is to be found amongst them, much sincere piety, and availing, though not always well-informed, Christianity: yet I never attended a meeting of theirs, but I came away with the reflection, how different what I heard was from what I read! I do not mean in doctrine, with which at present, I have no concern, but in manner; how different from the calmness, the sobriety, the good sense, and, I may add, the strength and authority, of our Lord's discourses!

IV. It is very usual with the human mind, to substitute forwardness and fervency in a

particular cause, for the merit of general and regular morality: and it is natural, and politic also, in the leader of a sect or party, to encourage such a disposition in his followers. Christ did not overlook this turn of thought; yet, though avowedly placing himself at the head of a new institution, he notices it only to condemn it. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto you I never knew you; depart from me, *ye that work iniquity**." So far was the Author of Christianity from courting the attachment of his followers by any sacrifice of principle, or by a condescension to the errors which even zeal in his service might have inspired! This was a proof both of sincerity and judgement.

V. Nor, fifthly, did he fall in with any

* Mat. vii. 21, 22.

of the depraved fashions of his country, or with the natural bias of his own education. Bred up a Jew, under a religion extremely technical, in an age and amongst a people more tenacious of the ceremonies than of any other part of that religion, he delivered an institution, containing less of ritual, and that more simple, than is to be found in any religion which ever prevailed amongst mankind. We have known, I do allow, examples of an enthusiasm, which has swept away all external ordinances before it. But this spirit certainly did not dictate our Saviour's conduct, either in his treatment of the religion of his country, or in the formation of his own institution. In both, he displayed the soundness and moderation of his judgement. He censured an overstrained scrupulousness, or perhaps an affectation of scrupulousness, about the Sabbath: but how did he censure it? not by contemning or decrying the institution itself, but by declaring that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath;" that is to say, that the Sabbath was to be subordinate to its purpose, and that that purpose was the real good of those who were the sub-

jects of the law. The same concerning the nicety of some of the Pharisees, in paying tithes of the most trifling articles, accompanied with a neglect of justice, fidelity, and mercy. He finds fault with them for misplacing their anxiety. He does not speak disrespectfully of the law of tithes, nor of their observance of it; but he assigns to each class of duties its proper station in the scale of moral importance. All this might be expected perhaps from a well-instructed, cool, and judicious philosopher, but was not to be looked for from an illiterate Jew; certainly not from an impetuous enthusiast.

VI. Nothing could be more quibbling, than were the comments and expositions of the Jewish doctors, at that time; nothing so puerile as their distinctions. Their evasion of the fifth commandment, their exposition of the law of oaths, are specimens of the bad taste in morals which then prevailed. Whereas, in a numerous collection of our Saviour's apophthegms, many of them referring to sundry precepts of the Jewish law, there is not to be found one example of

sophistry, or of false subtilty, or of any thing approaching thereunto.

VII. The national temper of the Jews was intolerant, narrow-minded, and excluding. In Jesus, on the contrary, whether we regard his lessons or his example, we see not only benevolence, but benevolence the most enlarged and comprehensive. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the very point of the story is, that the person relieved by him, was the national and religious enemy of his benefactor. Our Lord declared the equity of the Divine administration, when he told the Jews (what, probably, they were surprised to hear), "That many should come from the east and west, and should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but that the children of the kingdom should be cast into outer darkness*." His reproof of the hasty zeal of his disciples, who would needs call down fire from heaven to revenge an affront put upon their Master, shows the lenity of his character, and of his reli-

* Matt. viii. 11.

gion; and his opinion of the manner in which the most unreasonable opponents ought to be treated, or at least of the manner in which they ought not to be treated. The terms, in which his rebuke was conveyed, deserve to be noticed:— "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*."

VIII. Lastly, amongst the negative qualities of our religion, as it came out of the hands of its Founder and his apostles, we may reckon its complete abstraction from all views either of ecclesiastical or civil policy; or, to meet a language much in fashion with some men, from the politics either of priests or statesmen. Christ's declaration, that "his kingdom was not of this world," recorded by Saint John; his evasion of the question, whether it was lawful or not to give tribute unto Cæsar, mentioned by the three other evangelists: his reply to an application that was made to him, to interpose his authority in a question of property; "Man, who made me a ruler or a judge over

* Luke, ix. 55.

you?" ascribed to him by Saint Luke; his declining to exercise the office of a criminal judge in the case of the woman taken in adultery, as related by John, are all intelligible significations of our Saviour's sentiments upon this head. And with respect to *politics*, in the usual sense of that word, or discussions concerning different forms of government, Christianity declines every question upon the subject. Whilst politicians are disputing about monarchies, aristocracies, and republics, the Gospel is alike applicable, useful, and friendly to them all; inasmuch as, 1st, it tends to make men virtuous, and as it is easier to govern good men than bad men under any constitution; as, 2dly, it states obedience to government in ordinary cases, to be not merely a submission to force, but a duty of conscience; as, 3dly, it induces dispositions favourable to public tranquillity, a Christian's chief care being to pass quietly through this world to a better; as, 4thly, it prays for communities, and for the governors of communities, of whatever description or denomination they be, with a solicitude and fervency proportioned

to the influence which they possess upon human happiness. All which, in my opinion, is just as it should be. Had there been more to be found in Scripture of a political nature, or convertible to political purposes, the worst use would have been made of it, on whichever side it seemed to lie.

When, therefore, we consider Christ as a moral teacher (remembering that this was only a secondary part of his office; and that morality, by the nature of the subject, does not admit of discovery, properly so called);—when we consider either what he taught, or what he did not teach, either the substance or the manner of his instruction; his preference of solid to popular virtues, of a character which is commonly despised to a character which is universally extolled; his placing, in our licentious vices, the check in the right place, *viz.* upon the thoughts: his collecting of human duty into two well-devised rules, his repetition of these rules, the stress he laid upon them, especially in comparison with positive duties, and his fixing thereby the sen-

timents of his followers; his exclusion of all regard to reputation in our devotion and alms, and, by parity of reason, in our other virtues;—when we consider that his instructions were delivered in a form calculated for impression, the precise purpose in his situation to be consulted; and that they were illustrated by parables, the choice and structure of which would have been admired in any composition whatever;—when we observe him free from the usual symptoms of enthusiasm, heat and vehemence in devotion, austerity in institutions, and a wild particularity in the description of a future state; free also from the depravities of his age and country; without superstition amongst the most superstitious of men, yet not decrying positive distinctions or external observances, but soberly calling them to the principle of their establishment, and to their place in the scale of human duties; without sophistry or trifling, amidst teachers remarkable for nothing so much as frivolous subtilties and quibbling expositions; candid and liberal in his judgement of the rest of mankind, although belonging to a people who affected a separate claim to

Divine favour, and, in consequence of that opinion, prone to uncharitableness, partiality, and restitution;—when we find, in his religion, no scheme of building up a hierarchy, or of ministering to the views of human governments;—in a word, when we compare Christianity, as it came from its Author, either with other religions, or with itself in other hands, the most reluctant understanding will be induced to acknowledge the probity, I think also the good sense, of those to whom it owes its origin; and that some regard is due to the testimony of such men, when they declare their knowledge that the religion proceeded from God; and when they appeal, for the truth of their assertion, to miracles which they wrought, or which they saw.

Perhaps the qualities which we observe in the religion, may be thought to prove something more. They would have been extraordinary, had the religion come from any person; from the person from whom it did come, they are exceedingly so. What was Jesus in external appearance? A Jewish peasant, the son of a carpenter,

living with his father and mother in a remote province of Palestine, until the time that he produced himself in his public character. He had no master to instruct or prompt him; he had read no books, but the works of Moses and the Prophets; he had visited no polished cities; he had received no lessons from Socrates or Plato,—nothing to form in him a taste or judgement different from that of the rest of his countrymen, and of persons of the same rank of life with himself. Supposing it to be true, which it is not, that all his points of morality might be picked out of Greek and Roman writings, they were writings which *he* had never seen. Supposing them to be no more than what some or other had taught in various times and places, he could not collect them together.

Who were his coadjutors in the undertaking,—the persons into whose hands the religion came after his death? A few fishermen upon the lake of Tiberias, persons just as uneducated, and, for the purpose of framing rules of morality, as unpromising as himself. Suppose the mission to

be real, all this is accounted for; the unsuitableness of the authors to the production, of the characters to the undertaking, no longer surprises us: but without *reality*, it is very difficult to explain, how such a system should proceed from such persons. Christ was not like any other carpenter; the apostles were not like any other fishermen.

But the subject is not exhausted by these observations. That portion of it, which is most reducible to points of argument, has been stated, and, I trust, truly. There are, however, some topics, of a more diffuse nature, which yet deserve to be proposed to the reader's attention.

The *character of Christ* is a part of the morality of the Gospel: one strong observation upon which is, that, neither as represented by his followers, nor as attacked by his enemies, is he charged with any personal vice. This remark is as old as Origen: "Though innumerable lies and calumnies had been forged against the venerable Jesus, none had dared to charge

him with an intemperance*." Not a reflection upon his moral character, not an imputation or suspicion of any offence against purity and chastity, appears for five hundred years after his birth. This faultlessness is more peculiar than we are apt to imagine. Some stain pollutes the morals or the morality of almost every other teacher, and of every other lawgiver†. Zeno the stoic, and Diogenes the cynic, fell into the foulest impurities; of which also Socrates himself was more than suspected. Solon forbade unnatural crimes to slaves. Lycurgus tolerated theft as a part of education. Plato recommended a community of women. Aristotle maintained the general right of making war upon barbarians. The elder Cato was remarkable for the ill usage of his slaves; the younger gave up the person of his wife. One loose principle is found in almost all the Pagan moralists;

* Or. Ep. Cels. l. 3. num. 36. ed. Bened.

† See many instances collected by Grotius, de Veritate Christianæ Religionis, in the notes to his second book, p. 116. Pocock's edition.

is distinctly, however, perceived in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus; and that is, the allowing, and even the recommending to their disciples, a compliance with the religion, and with the religious rites, of every country into which they came. In speaking of the founders of new institutions, we cannot forget Mahomet. His licentious transgressions of his own licentious rules; his abuse of the character which he assumed, and of the power which he had acquired, for the purposes of personal and privileged indulgence; his avowed claim of a special permission from heaven, of unlimited sensuality, is known to every reader, as it is confessed by every writer, of the Moslem story.

Secondly, in the histories which are left us of Jesus Christ, although very short, and although dealing in narrative, and not in observation or panegyric, we perceive, beside the absence of every appearance of vice, traces of devotion, humility, benignity, mildness, patience, prudence. I speak of *traces* of these qualities, because the

qualities themselves are to be collected from incidents; inasmuch as the terms are never used of Christ in the Gospels, nor is any formal character of him drawn in any part of the New Testament.

Thus we see the *devoutness* of his mind, in his frequent retirement to solitary prayer*; in his habitual giving of thanks†; in his reference of the beauties and operations of nature to the bounty of Providence‡; in his earnest addresses to his Father, more particularly that short but solemn one before the raising of Lazarus from the dead§; and in the deep piety of his behaviour in the garden, on the last evening of his life‖; his *humility*, in his constant reproof of contentions for superiority¶; the *benignity* and affectionateness of his temper, in his kindness to children**: in the tears which he shed

* Matt. xiv. 23. Luke, ix. 28. Matt. xxvi. 36.
† Matt. xi. 25. Mark, viii. 6. John, vi. 23. Luke, xxii. 17.
‡ Matt. vi. 26—28. § John, xi. 41.
‖ Matt. xxvi. 36—47. ¶ Mark, ix. 33.
** Mark, x. 16.

over his falling country*, and upon the death of his friend†; in his noticing of the widow's mite‡; in his parables of the good Samaritan, of the ungrateful servant, and of the Pharisee and publican, of which parables no one but a man of humanity could have been the author: the *mildness* and lenity of his character is discovered, in his rebuke of the forward zeal of his disciples at the Samaritan village§; in his expostulation with Pilate‖; in his prayer for his enemies at the moment of his suffering¶, which, though it has been since very properly and frequently imitated, was then, I apprehend, new. His *prudence* is discerned, where prudence is most wanted, in his conduct on trying occasions, and in answers to artful questions. Of these, the following are examples:—His withdrawing, in various instances, from the first symptoms of tumult**, and with the express care, as appears from Saint Matthew††, of carrying

* Luke, xix. 41. † John, xi. 35. ‡ Mark, xii. 42.
§ Luke, ix. 55. ‖ John, xix. 11. ¶ Luke, xxiii. 34.
** Matt. xiv. 22. Luke, v. 15, 16. John, v. 13. vi. 15.
†† Chap. xii. 19.

on his ministry in quietness: his declining of every species of interference with the civil affairs of the country, which disposition is manifested by his behaviour in the case of the woman caught in adultery*, and in his repulse of the application which was made to him, to interpose his decision about a disputed inheritance†: his judicious, yet, as it should seem, unprepared answers, will be confessed in the case of the Roman tribute ‡: in the difficulty concerning the interfering relations of a future state, as proposed to him in the instance of a woman who had married seven brethren §; and, more especially, in his reply to those who demanded from him an explanation of the authority by which he acted, which reply consisted, in propounding a question to them, situated between the very difficulties into which they were insidiously endeavouring to draw *him*||.

Our Saviour's lessons, beside what has already been remarked in them, touch, and

* John, viii. 1. † Luke, xii. 14. ‡ Matt. xxii. 19.
§ Ib. 28. || Matt. xxi. 23, et seq.

that oftentimes by very affecting representations, upon some of the most interesting topics, of human duty, and of human meditation: upon the principles, by which the decisions of the last day will be regulated *; upon the superior, or rather the supreme importance of religion †: upon penitence, by the most pressing calls and the most encouraging invitations ‡; upon self-denial §, watchfulness ||, placability ¶, confidence in God **, the value of spiritual, that is, of mental worship ††, the necessity of moral obedience, and the directing of that obedience to the spirit and principle of the law, instead of seeking for evasions in a technical construction of its terms ‡‡.

If we extend our argument to other parts of the New Testament, we may offer, as

* Matt. xxv. 31, et seq.

† Mark, viii. 35. Matt. vi. 31—33. Luke, xii. 4, 5. 16—21.

‡ Luke, xv.

§ Matt. v. 29.

|| Mark, xiii. 37. Matt. xxiv. 42.—xxv. 13.

¶ Luke, xvii. 4. Matt. xviii. 33, et seq.

** Matt. vi. 25—30.

†† John, iv. 23, 24.

‡‡ Matt. v. 21.

amongst the best and shortest rules of life, or, which is the same thing, descriptions of virtue, that have ever been delivered, the following passages:

"Pure religion, and undefiled, before God, and the Father, is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*"

"Now the end of the commandment is, charity, out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned †."

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ‡."

Enumerations of virtues and vices, and those sufficiently accurate, and unquestionably just, are given by Saint Paul to his converts in three several epistles §.

* James, i. 27. † 1 Tim. i. 5. ‡ Tit. ii. 11, 12.
§ Gal. v. 19. Col. iii. 12. 1 Cor. xiii.

The relative duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of Christian teachers and their flocks, of governors and their subjects, are set forth by the same writer*, not indeed with the copiousness, the detail, or the distinctness, of a moralist, who should, in these days, sit down to write chapters upon the subject, but with the leading rules and principles in each; and, above all, with truth, and with authority.

Lastly, the whole volume of the New Testament is replete with *piety*; with, what were almost unknown to Heathen moralists, *devotional virtues*, the most profound veneration of the Deity, an habitual sense of his bounty and protection, a firm confidence in the final result of his councils and dispensations, a disposition to resort, upon all occasions, to his mercy, for the supply of human wants, for assistance in danger, for relief from pain, for the pardon of sin.

* Eph. v. 33. vi. 1. 5. 2 Cor. vi. 6, 7. Rom. xiii.

CHAPTER III.

The candour of the writers of the New Testament.

I MAKE this candour to consist, in their putting down many passages, and noticing many circumstances, which no writer whatever was likely to have forged; and which no writer would have chosen to appear in his book, who had been careful to present the story in the most unexceptionable form, or who had thought himself at liberty to carve and mould the particulars of that story, according to his choice, or according to his judgement of the effect.

A strong and well-known example of the fairness of the evangelists, offers itself in their account of Christ's resurrection, namely, in their unanimously stating, that, after he was risen, he appeared to his disciples

alone. I do not mean that they have used the exclusive word *alone;* but that all the instances which they have recorded of his appearance, are instances of appearance to his disciples; that their reasonings upon it, and allusions to it, are confined to this supposition; and that, by one of them, Peter is made to say, "Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead*." The most common understanding must have perceived, that the history of the resurrection would have come with more advantage, if they had related that Jesus appeared, after he was risen, to his foes as well as his friends, to the scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish council, and the Roman governor: or even if they had asserted the public appearance of Christ in general unqualified terms, without noticing, as they have done, the presence of his disciples on each occasion, and noticing it in such a manner as to lead their readers to

* Acts, x. 40, 41.

suppose that none but disciples were present. They *could* have represented in one way as well as the other. And if their point had been, to have the religion believed, whether true or false; if they had fabricated the story *ab initio;* or if they had been disposed either to have delivered their testimony as witnesses, or to have worked up their materials and information as historians, in such a manner as to render their narrative as specious and unobjectionable as they could; in a word, if they had thought of any thing but of the truth of the case, as they understood and believed it; they would, in their account of Christ's several appearances after his resurrection, at least have omitted this restriction. At this distance of time, the account as we have it, is perhaps more credible than it would have been the other way; because this manifestation of the historians' candour, is of more advantage to their testimony, than the difference in the circumstances of the account would have been to the nature of the evidence. But this is an effect which the evangelists would not foresee: and I think that it was by no

means the case at the time when the books were composed.

Mr. Gibbon has argued for the genuineness of the Koran, from the confessions which it contains, to the apparent disadvantage of the Mahometan cause*. The same defence vindicates the genuineness of our Gospels, and without prejudice to the cause at all.

There are some other instances in which the evangelists honestly relate what, they must have perceived, would make against them.

Of this kind is John the Baptist's message, preserved by Saint Matthew (xi. 2.), and Saint Luke (vii. 18.): "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" To confess, still more to state, that John the Baptist had his doubts concerning the character of

* Vol. ix. c. 50, note 96.

Jesus, could not but afford a handle to cavil and objection. But truth, like honesty, neglects appearances. The same observation, perhaps, holds concerning the apostasy of Judas*.

John, vi. 66. "From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Was it the part of a writer, who dealt in suppression and disguise, to put down *this* anecdote?

* I had once placed amongst these examples of fair concession, the remarkable words of Saint Matthew, in his account of Christ's appearance upon the Galilean mountain: "And when they saw him, they worshipped him; *but some doubted**." I have since, however, been convinced by what is observed concerning this passage in Dr. Townshend's discourse† upon the resurrection, that the transaction, as related by Saint Matthew, was really this: "Christ appeared first *at a distance;* the greater part of the company, the moment they saw him, worshipped, but some, as yet, *i. e.* upon this first distant view of his person, doubted; whereupon Christ *came up*‡ to them, and spake to them," &c.: that the doubt, therefore, was a doubt only at first, for a moment, and upon his being seen at a distance, and was afterwards dispelled by his nearer approach, and by his entering into conversation with them.

* Chap. xxviii. 17. † Page 177.

‡ Saint Matthew's words are, Και προσελθων ὁ Ἰησους, ελαλησεν αυτοις. This intimates, that, when he first appeared, it was at a distance, at least from many of the spectators. Ib. p. 107.

Or this, which Matthew has preserved (xiii. 58.)? "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

Again, in the same evangelist (v. 17, 18): "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil: for, verily, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." At the time the Gospels were written, the apparent tendency of Christ's mission was to diminish the authority of the Mosaic code, and it was so considered by the Jews themselves. It is very improbable, therefore, that, without the constraint of truth, Matthew should have ascribed a saying to Christ, which, *primo intuitu*, militated with the judgement of the age in which his Gospel was written. Marcion thought this text so objectionable, that he altered the words, so as to invert the sense *.

Once more (Acts, xxv. 19.): "They brought none accusation against him, of

* Lardner, Cred. vol. xv. p. 422.

such things, as I supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Nothing could be more in the character of a Roman governor than these words. But that is not precisely the point I am concerned with. A mere panegyrist, or a dishonest narrator, would not have represented his cause, or have made a great magistrate represent it, in this manner, *i. e.* in terms not a little disparaging, and bespeaking, on his part, much unconcern and indifference about the matter. The same observation may be repeated of the speech, which is ascribed to Gallio (Acts, xviii. 15.); "If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

Lastly, where do we discern a stronger mark of candour, or less disposition to extol and magnify, than in the conclusion of the same history? in which the evangelist, after relating that Paul, on his first arrival at Rome, preached to the Jews from morning until evening, adds; "And some be-

lieved the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

The following, I think, are passages which were very unlikely to have presented themselves to the mind of a forger or a fabulist.

Matt. xxi. 21. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done unto the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done; all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, it shall be done*." It appears to me very improbable that these words should have been put into Christ's mouth, if he had not actually spoken them. The term "faith," as here used, is perhaps rightly interpreted of confidence in that internal notice, by which the apostles were admonished of their power to perform any particular miracle. And this exposition

* See also chap. xvii. 20. Luke, xvii. 6.

renders the sense of the text more easy. But the words, undoubtedly, in their obvious construction, carry with them a difficulty, which no writer would have brought upon himself officiously.

Luke, ix. 59. "And he said unto another, Follow me: but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God *." This answer, though very expressive of the transcendent importance of religious concerns, was apparently harsh and repulsive; and such as would not have been made for Christ, if he had not really used it. At least some other instance would have been chosen.

The following passage, I, for the same reason, think impossible to have been the production of artifice, or of a cold forgery: —"But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgement? and

* See also Matt. viii. 21.

whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire (Gehennæ)." Matt. v. 22. It is emphatic, cogent, and well calculated for the purpose of impression; but is inconsistent with the supposition of art or wariness on the part of the relater.

The short reply of our Lord to Mary Magdalen, after his resurrection (John, xx. 16, 17.), "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto my Father," in my opinion, must have been founded in a reference or allusion to some prior conversation, for the want of knowing which, his meaning is hidden from us. This very obscurity, however, is a proof of genuineness. No one would have forged such an answer.

John, vi. The whole of the conversation, recorded in this chapter, is, in the highest degree, unlikely to be fabricated, especially the part of our Saviour's reply between the fiftieth and the fifty-eighth verse. I need only put down the first sentence: "I am

the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Without calling in question the expositions that have been given of this passage, we may be permitted to say, that it labours under an obscurity, in which it is impossible to believe that any one, who made speeches for the persons of his narrative, would have voluntarily involved them. That this discourse was obscure, even at the time, is confessed by the writer who had preserved it, when he tells us, at the conclusion, that many of our Lord's disciples, when they had heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can bear it?"

Christ's taking of a young child, and placing it in the midst of his contentious disciples (Matt. xviii. 2.), though as decisive a proof, as any could be, of the benignity of his temper, and very expressive of the character of the religion which he wished to inculcate, was not by any means

an obvious thought. Nor am I acquainted with any thing in any ancient writing which resembles it.

The account of the institution of the eucharist bears strong internal marks of genuineness. If it had been feigned, it would have been more full; it would have come nearer to the actual mode of celebrating the rite, as that mode obtained very early in Christian churches: and it would have been more formal than it is. In the forged piece, called the Apostolic Constitutions, the apostles are made to enjoin many parts of the ritual which was in use in the second and third centuries, with as much particularity as a modern rubric could have done. Whereas, in the history of the Lord's supper, as we read it in Saint Matthew's Gospel, there is not so much as the command to repeat it. This, surely, looks like undesignedness. I think also that the difficulty arising from the conciseness of Christ's expression, "This is my body," would have been avoided in a made-up story. I allow that the explication of these words, given by Protestants,

is satisfactory; but it is deduced from a diligent comparison of the words in question with forms of expression used in Scripture, and especially by Christ upon other occasions. No writer would arbitrarily and unnecessarily have thus cast in his reader's way a difficulty, which, to say the least, it required research and erudition to clear up.

Now it ought to be observed, that the argument which is built upon these examples, extends both to the authenticity of the books and to the truth of the narrative: for it is improbable that the forger of a history in the name of another should have inserted such passages into it: and it is improbable also, that the persons whose names the books bear should have fabricated such passages; or even have allowed them a place in their work, if they had not believed them to express the truth.

The following observation, therefore, of Dr. Lardner, the most candid of all advocates, and the most cautious of all

inquirers, seems to be well-founded:— "Christians are induced to believe the writers of the Gospel, by observing the evidences of piety and probity that appear in their writings, in which there is no deceit, or artifice, or cunning, or design." "No remarks," as Dr. Beattie hath properly said, "are thrown in, to anticipate objections; nothing of that caution, which never fails to distinguish the testimony of those who are consious of imposture; no endeavour to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative."

I beg leave to cite also another author*, who has well expressed the reflection which the examples now brought forward were intended to suggest. "It doth not appear that ever it came into the mind of these writers, to consider how this or the other action would appear to mankind, or what objections might be raised upon them. But without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you, at no pains to

* Duchal, p. 97, 98.

think whether they would appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony, there is no help for it: they tell the truth, and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like sincerity, and that they published nothing to the world but what they believed themselves."

As no improper supplement to this chapter, I crave a place here for observing the extreme *naturalness* of some of the things related in the New Testament.

Mark, ix. 23. "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." This struggle in the father's heart, between solicitude for the preservation of his child, and a kind of involuntary distrust of Christ's power to heal him, is here expressed with an air of reality, which could hardly be counterfeited.

Again (Matt. xxi. 9.), the eagerness of the people to introduce Christ into Jerusalem, and their demand, a short time afterwards, of his crucifixion, when he did not turn out what they expected him to be, so far from affording matter of objection, represents popular favour in exact agreement with nature and with experience, as the flux and reflux of a wave.

The rulers and Pharisees rejecting Christ, whilst many of the common people received him, was the effect which, in the then state of Jewish prejudices, I should have expected. And the reason with which they who rejected Christ's mission kept themselves in countenance, and with which also they answered the arguments of those who favoured it, is precisely the reason which such men usually give:—"Have any of the scribes or Pharisees believed on him?" (John, vii. 48.)

In our Lord's conversation at the well (John, iv. 29.), Christ had surprised the Samaritan woman with an allusion to a single particular in her domestic situation, "Thou

hast had five husbands; and he, whom thou now hast, is not thy husband." The woman, soon after this, ran back to the city, and called out to her neighbours, "Come, see a man which told me *all things* that ever I did." This exaggeration appears to me very natural; especially in the hurried state of spirits into which the woman may be supposed to have been thrown.

The lawyer's subtilty in running a distinction upon the word neighbour, in the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," was no less natural, than our Saviour's answer was decisive and satisfactory (Luke, x. 29.). The lawyer of the New Testament, it must be observed, was a Jewish divine.

The behaviour of Gallio (Acts, xviii. 12—17.), and of Festus (xxv. 18, 19.), have been observed upon already.

The consistency of Saint Paul's character throughout the whole of his history (*viz.* the warmth and activity of his zeal, first against, and then for, Christianity), carries

with it very much of the appearance of truth.

There are also some *properties*, as they may be called, observable in the Gospels; that is, circumstances separately suiting with the situation, character, and intention of their respective authors.

Saint Matthew, who was an inhabitant of Galilee, and did not join Christ's society until some time after Christ had come into Galilee to preach, has given us very little of his history prior to that period. Saint John, who had been converted before, and who wrote to supply omissions in the other Gospels, relates some remarkable particulars, which had taken place before Christ left Judea, to go into Galilee*.

Saint Matthew (xv. 1.) has recorded the cavil of the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus, for eating "with unclean hands." Saint Mark has also (vii. 1.) recorded the same transaction (taken probably from

* Hartley's Observations, vol. ii. p. 103.

Saint Matthew), but with this addition; "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders: and when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not: and many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables." Now Saint Matthew was not only a Jew himself, but it is evident, from the whole structure of his Gospel, especially from his numerous references to the Old Testament, that he wrote for Jewish readers. The above explanation, therefore, in him, would have been unnatural, as not being wanted by the readers whom he addressed. But in Mark, who, whatever use he might make of Matthew's Gospel, intended his own narrative for a general circulation, and who himself travelled to distant countries in the service of the religion, it was properly added.

CHAPTER IV.

Identity of Christ's character.

The argument expressed by this title, I apply principally to the comparison of the first three Gospels with that of Saint John. It is known to every reader of Scripture, that the passages of Christ's history, preserved by Saint John, are, except his passion and resurrection, for the most part, different from those which are delivered by the other evangelists. And I think the ancient account of this difference to be the true one, *viz.* that Saint John wrote *after* the rest, and to supply what he thought omissions in their narratives, of which the principal were our Saviour's conferences with the Jews of Jerusalem, and his discourses to his apostles at his last supper. But what I observe in the comparison of these several accounts is, that, although actions and discourses are ascribed to

Christ by Saint John, in general different from what are given to him by the other evangelists, yet, under this diversity, there is a similitude of *manner*, which indicates that the actions and discourses proceeded from the same person. I should have laid little stress upon a repetition of actions substantially alike, or of discourses containing many of the same expressions, because that is a species of resemblance, which would either belong to a true history, or might easily be imitated in a false one. Nor do I deny, that a dramatic writer is able to sustain propriety and distinction of character, through a great variety of separate incidents and situations. But the evangelists were not dramatic writers; nor possessed the talents of dramatic writers; nor will it, I believe, be suspected, that they *studied* uniformity of character, or ever thought of any such thing, in the person who was the subject of their histories. Such uniformity, if it exist, is on their part casual; and if there be, as I contend there is, a perceptible resemblance of *manner*, in passages, and between discourses, which are in themselves extremely distinct, and

are delivered by historians writing without any imitation of, or reference to, one another, it affords a just presumption, that these are, what they profess to be, the actions and the discourses of the same real person; that the evangelists wrote from fact, and not from imagination.

The article in which I find this agreement most strong, is in our Saviour's mode of teaching, and in that particular property of it, which consists in his drawing of his doctrine from the occasion; or, which is nearly the same thing, raising reflections from the objects and incidents before him, or turning a particular discourse then passing, into an opportunity of general instruction.

It will be my business to point out this *manner* in the first three evangelists; and then to enquire, whether it do not appear also, in several examples of Christ's discourses, preserved by Saint John.

The reader will observe in the following quotations, that the Italic letter contains

the reflection; the common letter, the incident or occasion from which it springs.

Matt. xii. 47—50. "Then they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered, and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: *for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*"

Matt. xvi. 5. "And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread; then Jesus said unto them, *Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees.* And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.—How is it that ye do not understand, that I speak it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees? Then understood they, *how that he bade them not beware*

of the leaven of bread, but of the DOCTRINE *of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."*

Matt. xv. 1, 2. 10, 11. 15—20. "Then came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.——And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear and understand: *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*—— Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? but those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man: *for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man:* BUT TO EAT WITH UNWASHEN HANDS, DEFILETH NOT A MAN." Our Saviour.

on this occasion, expatiates rather more at large than usual, and his discourse also is more divided: but the concluding sentence brings back the whole train of thought to the incident in the first verse, *viz.* the objurgatory question of the Pharisees, and renders it evident that the whole sprang from that circumstance.

Mark, x. 13, 14, 15. "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them: but when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: *for of such is the kingdom of God: verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*"

Mark, i. 16, 17. "Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers; and Jesus said unto them, *Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

Luke, xi. 27. "And it came to pass as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked: but he said, *Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*"

Luke, xiii. 1—3, "There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices; and Jesus answering, said unto them, *Suppose ye, that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*"

Luke, xiv. 15. "And when one of them that sat at meat with him, heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, *A certain man made a great supper, and bade many,*" &c. The parable is rather too long for insertion, but affords a striking instance of

Christ's *manner* of raising a discourse from the occasion. Observe also in the same chapter two other examples of advice, drawn from the circumstances of the entertainment and the behaviour of the guests.

We will now see, how this *manner* discovers itself in *Saint John's* history of Christ.

John, vi. 25. "And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them, and said, Verily I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.*"

John, iv. 12. "Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered, and said unto her (the woman of Samaria), Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst

again; but *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.*"

John, iv. 31. "In the mean while, his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat; but he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, *My meat is, to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work.*"

John, ix. 1—5. "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth: and his disciples asked him, saying, Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. *I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*"

John, ix. 35—40. "Jesus heard that they had cast him (the blind man above mentioned) out: and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And he answered, and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe; and he worshipped him. And Jesus said, *For judgement I have come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see, might be made blind.*"

All that the reader has now to do, is to compare the series of examples taken from Saint John, with the series of examples taken from the other evangelists, and to judge whether there be not a visible agreement of *manner* between them. In the above-quoted passages, the occasion is stated, as well as the reflection. They seem, therefore, the most proper for the purpose of our argument. A large, however, and curious collection has been made by different writers*,

* Newton on Daniel, p. 148, note *a*. Jortin, Dis. p. 213. Bishop Law's Life of Christ.

of instances, in which it is extremely probable that Christ spoke in allusion to some object, or some occasion, then before him, though the mention of the occasion, or of the object, be omitted in the history. I only observe, that these instances are common to Saint John's Gospel with the other three.

I conclude this article by remarking, that nothing of this *manner* is perceptible in the speeches recorded in the Acts, or in any other but those which are attributed to Christ, and that, in truth, it was a very unlikely manner for a forger or fabulist to attempt; and a manner very difficult for any writer to execute, if he had to supply all the materials, both the incidents and the observations upon them, out of his own head. A forger or a fabulist would have made for Christ, discourses exhorting to virtue and dissuading from vice in general terms. It would never have entered into the thoughts of either, to have crowded together such a number of allusions to time, place, and other little circumstances, as occur, for instance, in the sermon on the

mount, and which nothing but the actual presence of the objects could have suggested*.

II. There appears to me to exist an affinity between the history of Christ's placing a little child in the midst of his disciples, as related by the first three evangelists†, and the history of Christ's washing his disciples' feet, as given by Saint John‡. In the stories themselves there is no resemblance. But the affinity which I would point out consists in these two articles: First, that both stories denote the emulation which prevailed amongst Christ's disciples, and his own care and desire to correct it; the moral of both is the same. Secondly, that both stories are specimens of the same manner of teaching, *viz.* by action; a mode of emblematic instruction extremely peculiar, and, in these passages, ascribed, we see, to our Saviour, by the first three evangelists, and by Saint John, in instances totally unlike, and without the

* See Bishop Law's Life of Christ.

† Matt. xviii. 1. Mark, ix. 33. Luke, ix. 46.

‡ Chap. xiii. 3.

smallest suspicion of their borrowing from each other.

III. A singularity in Christ's language, which runs through all the evangelists, and which is found in those discourses of Saint John, that have nothing similar to them in the other Gospels, is the appellation of "the Son of man;" and it is in all the evangelists found under the peculiar circumstance of being applied by Christ to himself, but of never being used of him, or towards him, by any other person. It occurs seventeen times in Matthew's Gospel, twenty times in Mark's, twenty-one times in Luke's, and eleven times in John's, and always with this restriction.

IV. A point of agreement in the conduct of Christ, as represented by his different historians, is that of his withdrawing himself out of the way, whenever the behaviour of the multitude indicated a disposition to tumult.

Matt. xiv. 22. "And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship,

and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude away. And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray."

Luke, v. 15, 16. "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities: and he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."

With these quotations, compare the following from Saint John:

Chap. v. 13. "And he that was healed, wist not who it was; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place."

Chap. vi. 15 "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."

In this last instance, Saint John gives the motive of Christ's conduct, which is left

unexplained by the other evangelists, who have related the conduct itself.

V. Another, and a more singular circumstance in Christ's ministry, was the reserve, which, for some time, and upon some occasions at least, he used in declaring his own character, and his leaving it to be collected from his works rather than his professions. Just reasons for this reserve, have been assigned*. But it is not what one would have expected. We meet with it in Saint Matthew's Gospel, (chap. xvi. 20.): "Then charged he his disciples, that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." Again, and upon a different occasion, in Saint Mark's, (chap. iii. 11.): "And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried saying, Thou art the Son of God: and he straitly charged them that they should not make him known." Another instance similar to this last is recorded by Saint Luke, (chap. iv. 41.). What we thus find in the three evangelists, appears also in a passage

* See Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity.

of Saint John, (chap. x. 24, 25.). "Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." The occasion here was different from any of the rest; and it was indirect. We only discover Christ's conduct though the upbraidings of his adversaries. But all this strengthens the argument. I had rather at any time surprise a coincidence in some oblique allusion, than read it in broad assertions.

VI. In our Lord's commerce with his disciples, one very observable particular is the difficulty which they found in understanding him, when he spoke to them of the future part of his history, especially of what related to his passion or resurrection. This difficulty produced, as was natural, a wish in them to ask for further explanation; from which, however, they appear to have been sometimes kept back, by the fear of giving offence. All these circumstances are distinctly noticed by Mark and Luke, upon the occasion of his informing them (probably for the first time), that the

Son of man should be delivered into the hands of men. "They understood not," the evangelists tell us, "this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying." Luke, ix. 45.; Mark, ix. 32. In Saint John's Gospel we have, on a different occasion, and in a different instance, the same difficulty of apprehension, the same curiosity, and the same restraint:—"A little while and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us? A little while and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said, therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them,—" &c. John, xvi. 16. et seq.

VII. The meekness of Christ during his last sufferings, which is conspicuous in the narratives of the first three evangelists, is preserved in that of Saint John under sepa-

rate examples. The answer given by him, in Saint John*, when the high priest asked him of his disciples and his doctrine; "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing; why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them;" is very much of a piece with his reply to the armed party which seized him, as we read it in Saint Mark's Gospel, and in Saint Luke's†: "Are you come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not." In both answers, we discern the same tranquillity, the same reference to his public teaching. His mild expostulation with Pilate, on two several occasions, as related by Saint John‡, is delivered with the same unruffled temper, as that which conducted him through the last scene of his life, as described by his other evangelists. His answer in Saint John's Gospel,

* Chap. xviii. 20, 21.

† Mark, xiv. 48. Luke, xxii. 52.

‡ Chap. xviii. 34. xix. 11.

to the officer who struck him with the palm of his hand, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me*?" was such an answer, as might have been looked for from the person, who, as he proceeded to the place of execution, bid his companions (as we are told by Saint Luke†), weep not for him, but for themselves, their posterity, and their country; and who, whilst he was suspended upon the cross, prayed for his murderers, "for they know not," said he, "what they do." The urgency also of his judges and his prosecutors to extort from him a defence to the accusation, and his unwillingness to make any (which was a peculiar circumstance), appears in Saint John's account, as well as in that of the other evangelists‡.

There are moreover two other correspondencies between Saint John's history of the transaction and theirs, of a kind somewhat different from those which we have been now mentioning.

* Chap. xviii. 23. † Chap. xxiii. 28.

‡ See John, xix. 9. Matt. xxvii. 14. Luke, xxiii. 9.

The first three evangelists record what is called our Saviour's agony, *i. e.* his devotion in the garden immediately before he was apprehended; in which narrative, they all make him pray, "that the cup might pass from him." This is the particular metaphor which they all ascribe to him. Saint Matthew adds, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done*." Now Saint John does not give the scene in the garden: but when Jesus was seized, and some resistance was attempted to be made by Peter, Jesus, according to his account, checked the attempt with this reply: "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it†?" This is something more than consistency; it is coincidence: because it is extremely natural, that Jesus, who, before he was apprehended, had been praying his Father, that "that cup might pass from him," yet with such a pious retraction of his request, as to have added, "If this cup may not pass from me, thy will be done;" it was

* Chap. xxvi. 42. † Chap. xviii. 11.

natural, I say, for the same person, when he actually was apprehended, to express the resignation to which he had already made up his thoughts, and to express it in the form of speech which he had before used, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" This is a coincidence between writers, in whose narratives there is no imitation, but great diversity.

A second similar correspondency is the following: Matthew and Mark make the charge, upon which our Lord was condemned, to be a threat of destroying the temple; "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple, made with hands, and, within three days, I will build another made without hands*:" but they neither of them inform us, upon what circumstance this calumny was founded. Saint John, in the early part of the history †, supplies us with this information; for he relates, that, on our Lord's first journey to Jerusalem, when the Jews asked him, "What sign showest thou

* Mark, xiv. 58. † Chap. ii. 19.

unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? he answered, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This agreement could hardly arise from any thing but the truth of the case. From any care or design in Saint John, to make his narrative tally with the narratives of other evangelists, it certainly did not arise, for no such design appears, but the absence of it.

A strong and more general instance of agreement, is the following.—The first three evangelists have related the appointment of the twelve apostles*; and have given a catalogue of their names in form. John, without ever mentioning the appointment, or giving the catalogue, supposes, throughout his whole narrative, Christ to be accompanied by a select party of disciples; the number of these to be twelve†; and whenever he happens to notice any one as of that number‡, it is one included in the catalogue of the other evangelists: and the names principally occurring in the course of *his* history of Christ, are the names ex-

* Matt. x. 1. Mark, iii. 14. Luke, vi. 12.
† Chap. vi. 70. ‡ Chap. xx. 24. vi. 71.

tant in their list. This last agreement, which is of considerable moment, runs through every Gospel, and through every chapter of each.

All this bespeaks reality.

CHAPTER V.

Originality of our Saviour's Character.

The Jews, whether right or wrong, had understood their prophecies to foretell the advent of a person, who by some supernatural assistance should advance their nation to independence, and to a supreme degree of splendour and prosperity. This was the reigning opinion and expectation of the times.

Now, had Jesus been an enthusiast, it is probable that his enthusiasm would have fallen in with the popular delusion, and that, whilst he gave himself out to be the person intended by these predictions, he would have assumed the character to which they were universally supposed to relate.

Had he been an impostor, it was his business to have flattered the prevailing hopes, because these hopes were to be the instruments of his attraction and success.

But, what is better than conjectures, is the fact, that all the pretended Messiahs actually did so. We learn from Josephus, that there were many of these. Some of them, it is probable, might be impostors, who thought that an advantage was to be taken of the state of public opinion. Others, perhaps, were enthusiasts, whose imagination had been drawn to this particular object, by the language and sentiments which prevailed around them. But, whether impostors or enthusiasts, they concurred in producing themselves in the character which their countrymen looked for, that is to say, as the restorers and deliverers of the nation, in that sense in which restoration and deliverance were expected by the Jews.

Why therefore Jesus, if he was, like them, either an enthusiast or impostor, did not pursue the same conduct as they did, in

framing his character and pretentions, it will be found difficult to explain. A mission, the operation and benefit of which was to take place in another life, was a thing unthought of as the subject of these prophecies. That Jesus, coming to them as their Messiah, should come under a character totally different from that in which they expected him; should deviate from the general persuasion, and deviate into pretensions absolutely singular and original; appears to be inconsistent with the imputation of enthusiasm or imposture, both which, by their nature, I should expect, would, and both which, throughout the experience which this very subject furnishes, in fact *have*, followed the opinions that obtained at the time.

If it be said, that Jesus, having tried the other plan, turned at length to this; I answer, that the thing is said without evidence; against evidence; that it was competent to the rest to have done the same, yet that nothing of this sort was thought of by any.

CHAPTER VI.

One argument, which has been much relied upon (but not more than its just weight deserves), is the conformity of the facts occasionally mentioned or referred to in Scripture, with the state of things in those times, as represented by foreign and independent accounts; which conformity proves, that the writers of the New Testament possessed a species of local knowledge, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, and to one living in that age. This argument, if well made out by examples, is very little short of proving the absolute genuineness of the writings. It carries them up to the age of the reputed authors, to an age in which it must have been difficult to impose upon the Christian public, forgeries in the names of those authors, and in which there is no evidence that any forgeries were attempted.

It proves at least, that, the books, whoever were the authors of them, were composed by persons living in the time and country in which these things were transacted; and consequently capable, by their situation, of being well informed of the facts which they relate. And the argument is stronger when applied to the New Testament, than it is in the case of almost any other writings, by reason of the mixed nature of the allusions which this book contains. The scene of action is not confined to a single country, but displayed in the greatest cities of the Roman empire. Allusions are made to the manners and principles of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews. This variety renders a forgery proportionably more difficult, especially to writers of a posterior age. A Greek or Roman Christian, who lived in the second or third century, would have been wanting in Jewish literature; a Jewish convert in those ages would have been equally deficient in the knowledge of Greece and Rome *.

* Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Marsh's translation), c. ii. sect. xi.

This, however, is an argument which depends entirely upon an induction of particulars; and as, consequently, it carries with it little force, without a view of the instances upon which it is built, I have to request the reader's attention to a detail of examples, distinctly and articulately proposed. In collecting these examples, I have done no more than epitomise the first volume of the first part of Dr. Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History. And I have brought the argument within its present compass, first, by passing over some of his sections in which the accordancy appeared to me less certain, or upon subjects not sufficiently appropriate or circumstantial; secondly, by contracting every section into the fewest words possible, contenting myself for the most part with a mere *apposition* of passages; and, thirdly, by omitting many disquisitions, which, though learned and accurate, are not absolutely necessary to the understanding or verification of the argument.

The writer principally made use of in the inquiry, is Josephus. Josephus was born

at Jerusalem four years after Christ's ascension. He wrote his history of the Jewish war some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in the year of our Lord LXX, that is, thirty-seven years after the ascension; and his history of the Jews he finished in the year XCIII, that is, sixty years after the ascension.

At the head of each article, I have referred, by figures included in brackets, to the page of Dr. Lardner's volume, where the section, from which the abridgement is made, begins. The edition used, is that of 1741.

I. [p. 14.] Matt. ii. 22. "When he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee."

In this passage it is asserted, that Archelaus succeeded Herod in Judea; and it is implied, that his power did *not* extend to

Galilee. Now we learn from Josephus, that Herod the Great, whose dominion included all the land of Israel, appointed Archelaus his successor in *Judea*, and assigned the *rest* of his dominions to other sons; and that this disposition was ratified, as to the main parts of it, by the Roman emperor *.

Saint Matthew says, that Archelaus *reigned*, was *king* in Judea. Agreeably to this, we are informed by Josephus, not only that Herod appointed Archelaus his successor in Judea, but that he also appointed him with the title of King; and the Greek verb βασιλευει which the evangelist uses to denote the government and rank of Archelaus, is used likewise by Josephus †.

The cruelty of Archelaus's character, which is not obscurely intimated by the evangelist, agrees with divers particulars in his history, preserved by Josephus:—"In the tenth year of his government,

* Ant. lib. xvii. c. 8. sect. 1.

† De Bell. lib. i. c. 33. sect. 7.

the chief of the Jews and Samaritans, not being able to endure his cruelty and tyranny, presented complaints against him to Cæsar*."

II. [¶. 19.] Luke, iii. 1. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar,—Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis,—the word of God came unto John."

By the will of Herod the Great, and the decree of Augustus thereupon, his two sons were appointed, one (Herod Antipas) tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, and the other (Philip) tetrarch of Trachonitis and the neighbouring countries†. We have therefore these two persons in the situations in which Saint Luke places them; and also, that they were in these situations in the *fifteenth* year of Tiberius, in other words, that they continued in possession of their territories and titles until that time, and

* Ant. lib. xvii. c. 13. sect. 1.

† Ant. lib. xvii. c. 8. sect. 1

afterwards, appears from a passage of Josephus, which relates of Herod, "that he was *removed* by Caligula, the successor of Tiberius*; and of Philip, that he died in the *twentieth* year of Tiberius, when he had governed Trachonitis and Batanea and Gaulanitis thirty-seven years†."

III. [p. 20.] Mark, vi. 17‡. "Herod had sent forth, and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison, for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her."

With this compare Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 6. sect. 1:—"He (Herod the tetrarch) made a visit to Herod his brother.—Here, falling in love with Herodias, the wife of the said Herod, he ventured to make her proposals of marriage§."

* Ant. lib. xviii. c. 8. sect. 2.

† Ant. lib. xviii. c. 5. sect. 6.

‡ See also Matt. xiv. 1—13.; Luke, iii. 19.

§ The affinity of the two accounts is unquestionable; but there is a difference in the name of Herodias's first husband, which, in the evangelist, is Philip; in Josephus, Herod. The difficulty, however, will not appear considerable, when

Again, Mark, vi. 22. "And when the *daughter of the said Herodias* came in and danced——"

With this also compare Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 6. sect. 4. "Herodias was married to Herod, son of Herod the Great. *They had a daughter*, whose name was Salome; after whose birth, Herodias, in utter violation of the laws of her country, left her husband, then living, and married Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, her husband's brother by the father's side."

IV. [p. 29.] Acts, xii. 1. "Now, about that time, *Herod the king* stretched forth his hands, to vex certain of the Church."

we recollect how common it was in those times, for the same person to bear two names. "Simon, which is called Peter; Lebbeus, whose surname is Thaddeus; Thomas, which is called Didymus; Simeon, who was called Niger; Saul, who was also called Paul." The solution is rendered likewise easier in the present case, by the consideration, that Herod the Great had children by seven or eight wives; that Josephus mentions three of his sons under the name of Herod: that it is nevertheless highly probable, that the brothers bore some additional name, by which they were distinguished from one another. Lardner, vol. ii. p. 897.

In the conclusion of the same chapter, Herod's *death* is represented to have taken place soon after this persecution. The accuracy of our historian, or, rather, the unmeditated coincidence, which truth of its own accord produces, is in this instance remarkable. There was no portion of time, for thirty years before, nor *ever* afterwards, in which there was a *king* at Jerusalem, a person exercising that authority in Judea, or to whom that title could be applied, except the three last years of this Herod's life, within which period the transaction recorded in the Acts is stated to have taken place. This prince was the grandson of Herod the Great. In the Acts, he appears under his family-name of Herod; by Josephus he was called Agrippa. For proof that he was a *king*, properly so called, we have the testimony of Josephus in full and direct terms:—"Sending for him to his palace, Caligula put a crown upon his head, and appointed him king of the tetrarchie of Philip, intending also to give him the tetrarchie of Lysanias*." And

* Antiq. xviii. c. 7. sect. 10.

that Judea was at last, but not until the last, included in his dominions, appears by a subsequent passage of the same Josephus, wherein he tells us, that Claudius, by a decree, confirmed to Agrippa the dominion which Caligula had given him; *adding also Judea and Samaria, in the utmost extent, as possessed by his grandfather Herod*.*

V. [p. 32.] Acts, xii. 19—23. "And he (Herod) went down from Judea to Cesarea, and there abode.—And on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them: and the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man: and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xix. c. 8. sect. 2. "He went to the city of Cesarea. Here he celebrated shows in honour of Cæsar. On the

* Antiq. xix. c. 5. sect. 1.

second day of the shows, early in the morning, he came into the theatre, dressed in a robe of silver, of most curious workmanship. The rays of the rising sun, reflected from such a splendid garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance. They called him a god; and entreated him to be propitious to them, saying, Hitherto we have respected you as a man; but now we acknowledge you to be more than mortal. The king neither reproved these persons, nor rejected the impious flattery.—Immediately after this, he was seized with pains in his bowels, extremely violent at the very first.—He was carried therefore with all haste to his palace. These pains continually tormenting him, he expired in five days' time."

The reader will perceive the accordancy of these accounts in various particulars. The place (Cesarea), the set day, the gorgeous dress, the acclamations of the assembly, the peculiar turn of the flattery, the reception of it, the sudden and critical incursion of the disease, are circumstances

noticed in both narratives. The worms, mentioned by Saint Luke, are not remarked by Josephus; but the appearance of these is a symptom, not unusually, I believe, attending the disease which Josephus describes, *viz.* violent affections of the bowels.

VI. [p. 41.] Acts, xxiv. 24. "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xx. c. 6. sect. 1, 2. "Agrippa gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of the Emesenes, when he had consented to be circumcised. —But this marriage of Drusilla with Azizus was dissolved in a short time after, in this manner:—When *Felix was procurator of Judea*, having had a sight of her, he was mightily taken with her.—She was induced to transgress the laws of her country, and marry Felix."

Here the public station of Felix, the

name of his wife, and the singular circumstance of her religion, all appear in perfect conformity with the evangelist.

VII. [p. 46.] "And after certain days, king Agrippa and Bernice came to Cesarea to salute Festus." By this passage we are in effect told, that Agrippa was a king, but not of Judea; for he came to salute Festus, who at this time administered the government of that country at Cesarea.

Now, how does the history of the age correspond with this account? The Agrippa here spoken of, was the son of Herod Agrippa, mentioned in the last article; but that he did not succeed to his father's kingdom, nor ever recovered Judea, which had been a part of it, we learn by the information of Josephus, who relates of him that, when his father was dead, Claudius intended, at first, to have put him immediately in possession of his father's dominions; but that, Agrippa being then but seventeen years of age, the emperor was persuaded to alter his mind, and appointed

Cuspius Fadus prefect of Judea and the whole kingdom*; which Fadus was succeeded by Tiberius Alexander, Cumanus, Felix, Festus†. But that, though disappointed of his father's kingdom, in which was included Judea, he was nevertheless rightly styled *King* Agrippa, and that he was in possession of considerable territories bordering upon Judea, we gather from the same authority; for, after several successive donations of country, "Claudius, at the same time that he sent Felix to be procurator of Judea, promoted Agrippa from Chalcis to a greater *kingdom*, giving to him the tetrarchie which had been Philip's; and he added moreover the *kingdom* of Lysanias, and the province that had belonged to Varus‡."

Saint Paul addresses this person as a Jew: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." As the son of Herod Agrippa, who is described by Josephus to have been a zealous Jew, it

* Antiq. xix. c. 9. ad fin.

† Ib. xx. De Bell. lib. ii.

‡ De Bell. lib. ii. c. 12. ad fin.

is reasonable to suppose that he maintained the same profession. But what is more material to remark, because it is more close and circumstantial, is, that Saint Luke, speaking of the father (Acts, xii. 1—3.), calls him Herod the king, and gives an example of the exercise of his authority at Jerusalem: speaking of the son (xxv. 13.), he calls him king, but not of Judea; which distinction agrees correctly with the history.

VIII. [p. 51.] Acts, xiii. 6. "And when they had gone through the isle (Cyprus) to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus, which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man."

The word, which is here translated deputy, signifies *proconsul*, and upon this word our observation is founded. The provinces of the Roman empire were of two kinds; those belonging to the emperor, in which the governor was called proprætor; and those belonging to the senate, in which the governor was called pro-

consul. And this was a regular distinction. Now it appears from Dio Cassius*, that the province of Cyprus, which in the original distribution was assigned to the emperor, had been transferred to the senate, in exchange for some others; and that, after this exchange, the appropriate title of the Roman governor was proconsul.

Ib. xviii. 12. [p. 55.] "And when Gallio was deputy *(proconsul)* of Achaia."

The propriety of the title "proconsul" is in this passage still more critical. For the province of Achaia, after passing from the senate to the emperor, had been restored again by the emperor Claudius to the senate (and consequently its government had become *proconsular)* only six or seven years before the time in which this transaction is said to have taken place †. And what confines with strictness the appellation to the time is, that Achaia under

* Lib. liv. ad A. U. 732.

† Suet. in Claud. c. xxv. Dio, lib. lxi.

the following reign ceased to be a Roman province at all.

IX. [p. 152.] It appears, as well from the general constitution of a Roman province, as from what Josephus delivers concerning the state of Judea in particular*, that the power of life and death resided exclusively in the Roman governor; but that the Jews, nevertheless, had magistates and a council, invested with a subordinate and municipal authority. This economy is discerned in every part of the Gospel narrative of our Saviour's crucifixion.

X. [p. 203.] Acts, ix. 31. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria."

This *rest* synchronizes with the attempt of Caligula to place his statue in the temple of Jerusalem; the threat of which outrage produced amongst the Jews a consternation that, for a season, di-

* Antiq. lib. xx. c. 8. sect. 5. c. 1. sect. 2.

verted their attention from every other object*.

XI. [p. 218.] Acts, xxi. 30. "And they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple; and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came to the chief captain of the *band*, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and demanded, who he was, and what he had done; and some cried one thing, and some another, among the multitude: and, when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the *castle*. And when he came upon the *stairs*, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people."

In this quotation, we have the band of Roman soldiers at Jerusalem, their office (to suppress tumults), the castle, the stairs, both, as it should seem, adjoining to the

* Joseph. de Bell. lib. xi. c. 13. sect. 1, 3, 4

temple. Let us inquire whether we can find these particulars in any other record of that age and place.

Joseph. de Bell. lib. v. c. 5. sect. 8. "Antonia was situated at the angle of the western and northern porticoes of the outer temple. It was built upon a rock fifty cubits high, steep on all sides.—On that side where it joined to the porticoes of the temple, there were *stairs* reaching to each portico, by which the *guard* descended; for there was always lodged here *a Roman legion*, and posting themselves in their armour in several places in the porticoes, they kept a watch on the people on the feast-days *to prevent all disorders;* for, as the temple was a guard to the city, so was Antonia to the temple."

XII. [p. 224.] Acts, iv. 1. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and *the captain of the temple*, and the Sadducees, came upon them." Here we have a public officer, under the title of captain of the temple, and he probably a Jew, as he accompanied the priests

and Sadducees in apprehending the apostles.

Joseph. de Bell. lib. ii. c. 17. sect. 2. "And at the *temple*, Eleazar, the son of Ananias the high-priest, a young man of a bold and resolute disposition, then *captain*, persuaded those who performed the sacred ministrations, not to receive the gift or sacrifice of any stranger."

XIII. [p. 225.] Acts, xxv. 12. "Then Festus, when he had conferred with the *council*, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go." That it was usual for the Roman presidents to have a council, consisting of their friends, and other chief Romans in the province, appears expressly in the following passage of Cicero's oration against Verres:—"Illud negare posses, aut nunc negabis, te, concilio tuo dimisso, viris primariis, qui in consilio C. Sacerdotis fuerant, tibique esse volebant, remotis, de re judicatâ judicâsse?"

XIV. [p. 235.] Acts, xvi. 13. "And (at Philippi) on the Sabbath, we went out of

the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made," or where a προσευχη, oratory, or place of prayer, was allowed. The particularity to be remarked, is the situation of the place where prayer was wont to be made, *viz.* by a *river-side.*

Philo, describing the conduct of the Jews of Alexandria, on a certain public occasion, relates of them, that, "early in the morning, flocking out of the gates of the city, they go to the *neighbouring shores* (for the προσευχαι were destroyed), and, standing in a most pure place, they lift up their voices with one accord*."

Josephus gives us a decree of the city of Halicarnassus, permitting the Jews to build oratories; a part of which decree runs thus:—"We ordain, that the Jews, who are willing, men and women, do observe the Sabbaths, and perform sacred rites according to the Jewish laws, and *build oratories by the sea-side*†."

* Philo in Flacc. p. 382.

† Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiv. c. 10. sect. 24.

Tertullian, among other Jewish rites and customs, such as feasts, sabbaths, fasts, and unleavened bread, mentions "orationes *litorales*," that is, prayers by the river-side*.

XV. [p. 255.] Acts, xxvi. 5. "After the most *straitest* sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee."

Joseph. de Bell. lib. i. c. 5. sect. 2. "The Pharisees were reckoned the most religious of any of the Jews, and to be the most *exact* and skilful in explaining the laws."

In the original, there is an agreement not only in the sense but in the expression, it being the same Greek adjective, which is rendered "strait" in the Acts, and "exact" in Josephus.

XVI. [p. 255.] Mark, vii. 3, 4. "The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and many other things there be which they have received to hold."

* Tertull. ad Nat. lib. i. c. 13.

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiii. c. 10. sect. 6. "The Pharisees have delivered to the people many institutions, as received from the fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses."

XVII. [p. 259.] Acts, xxiii. 8. "For the Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both."

Joseph. de Bell. lib. ii. c. 8. sect. 14. "They (the Pharisees) believe every soul to be immortal, but that the soul of the good only passes into another body, and that the soul of the wicked is punished with eternal punishment." On the other hand (Antiq. lib. xviii. c. i. sect. 4.), "It is the opinion of the Sadducees, that souls perish with the bodies."

XVIII. [p. 268.] Acts, v. 17. "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation." Saint Luke here intimates, that the

high priest was a Sadducee; which is a character one would not have expected to meet with in that station. This circumstance, remarkable as it is, was not however without examples.

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiii. c. 10. sect. 6, 7. "John Hyrcanus, high priest of the Jews, forsook the Pharisees upon a disgust, and joined himself to the party of the Sadducees." This high priest died one hundred and seven years before the Christian æra.

Again, (Antiq. lib. xx. c. 8. sect. 1.): "This Ananus the younger, who, as we have said just now, had received the high-priesthood, was fierce and haughty in his behaviour, and, above all men, bold and daring, and, moreover, *was of the sect of the Sadducees.* This high priest lived little more than twenty years after the transaction in the Acts.

XIX. [p. 282.] Luke, ix. 51. "And it came to pass, when the time was come that

he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xx. c. 5. sect. 1. "It was the custom of the Galileans, who went up to the holy city at the feasts, to travel through the country of Samaria. As they were in their journey, some inhabitants of the village called Ginæa, which lies on the borders of Samaria and the great plain, falling upon them, killed a great many of them."

XX. [p. 278.] John, iv. 20. "Our fathers," said the Samaritan woman, "worshipped in *this mountain;* and ye say, that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 5. sect. 1. "Commanding them to meet him at *mount*

Gerizzim, which is by them (the Samaritans) esteemed the most sacred of all mountains."

XXI. [p. 312.] Matt. xxvi. 3. "Then assembled together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, *who was called Caiaphas.*" That Caiaphas was high priest, and high priest throughout the presidentship of Pontius Pilate, and consequently at this time, appears from the following account;—He was made high priest by Valerius Gratus, *predecessor* of Pontius Pilate, and was removed from his office by Vitellius, president of Syria, *after* Pilate was sent away out of the province of Judea. Josephus relates the *advancement* of Caiaphas to the high-priesthood in this manner: "Gratus gave the high priesthood to Simon, the son of Camithus. He, having enjoyed this honour not above a year, was succeeded by Joseph, *who is also called Caiaphas**. After this, Gratus went away for Rome, having been eleven years

* Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 2. sect. 2.

in Judea; and *Pontius Pilate came thither as his successor.*" Of the *removal* of Caiaphas from his office, Josephus, likewise, afterwards informs us; and connects it with a circumstance which fixes the time to a date subsequent to the determination of Pilate's government—"Vitellius," he tells us, "ordered *Pilate to repair to Rome;* and *after that*, went up himself to Jerusalem, and then gave directions concerning several matters. And having done these things, he took away the priesthood from *the high priest* Joseph, who is called *Caiaphas**."

XXII. (Michaelis, c. xi. sect. 11.) Acts, xxiii. 4. "And they that stood by, said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest." Now, upon inquiry into the history of the age, it turns out, that Ananias, of whom this is spoken, was, in truth, *not* the high priest, though he was sitting in judgement in that assumed capacity. The case was, that he had formerly holden the office, and had been deposed:

* Antiq. lib. xvii. c. 5. sect. 3.

that the person who succeeded him had been murdered; that another was not yet appointed to the station; and that, during the vacancy, he had, of his own authority, taken upon himself the discharge of the office *. This singular situation of the high-priesthood took place during the interval between the death of Jonathan, who was murdered by order of Felix, and the accession of Ismaël, who was invested with the high-priesthood by Agrippa; and precisely in this interval it happened that Saint Paul was apprehended, and brought before the Jewish council.

XXIII. [p. 323.] Matt. xxvi. 59. "Now the *chief priests* and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against him."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 15. sect. 3, 4. "Then might be seen the *high priests themselves*, with ashes on their heads, and their breasts naked."

The agreement here consists in speaking

* Joseph. Antiq. l. xx. c. 5. sect. 2.; c. 6. sect. 2.; c. 9. sect. 2.

of the high priests or chief priests (for the name in the original is the same), in the *plural number*, when, in strictness, there was only *one* high priest: which may be considered as a proof, that the evangelists were habituated to the manner of speaking then in use, because they retain it when it is neither accurate nor just. For the sake of brevity, I have put down, from Josephus, only a single example of the application of this title in the plural number; but it is his usual style.

Ib. [p. 871.] Luke, iii. 1. "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, *Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests*, the word of God came unto John." There is a passage in Josephus very nearly parallel to this, and which may at least serve to vindicate the evangelist form objection, with respect to his giving the title of high priest specifically to two persons at the same time: "Quadratus sent two others of the most powerful men of the Jews, as

also the *high priests Jonathan and Ananias**." That Annas was a person in an eminent station, and possessed an authority co-ordinate with, or next to, that of the high priest properly so called, may be inferred from Saint John's Gospel, which, in the history of Christ's crucifixion, relates that "the soldiers led him away to Annas first†." And this might be noticed as an example of undesigned coincidence in the two evangelists.

Again, [p. 870.] Acts, iv. 6, Annas is called the high priest, though Caiaphas was in the office of the high-priesthood. In like manner, in Josephus‡, "Joseph, the son of Gorion, and the high priest Ananus, were chosen to be supreme governors of all things in the city." Yet Ananus, though here called the high priest Ananus, was not then in the office of the high-priesthood. The truth is, there is an indeterminateness in the use of this title in the Gospel; sometimes it is applied exclu-

* De Bell. lib. ix c. 12. sect. 6. † xviii. 13.

‡ Lib. ii. c. 20. sect. 3.

sively to the person who held the office at the time; sometimes to one or two more, who probably shared with him some of the powers or functions of the office; and, sometimes, to such of the priests as were eminent by their station or character*; and there is the very same indeterminateness in Josephus.

XXIV. [p. 347.] John, xix. 19, 20. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross." That such was the custom of the Romans on these occasions, appears from passages of Suetonius and Dio Cassius: "Patrem familias—canibus objecit, cum hoc *titulo*, Impiè locutus parmularius." Suet. Domit. cap. x. And in Dio Cassius we have the following: "Having led him through the midst of the court or assembly, *with a writing signifying the cause of his death*, and afterwards crucifying him." Book liv.

Ib. "And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." That it was also usual

* Mark, xiv. 53.

about this time, in Jerusalem, to set up advertisements in *different* languages, is gathered from the account which Josephus gives of an expostulatory message from Titus to the Jews, when the city was almost in his hands; in which he says, Did ye not erect pillars with inscriptions on them, *in the Greek and in our language*, "Let no one pass beyond these bounds?"

XXV. [p. 352.] Matt. xxvii. 26. "When he had *scourged* Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

The following passages occur in Josephus:

"Being *beaten*, they were crucified opposite to the citadel*."

"Whom, having *first scourged with whips*, he crucified†."

"He was burnt alive, *having been first beaten*‡."

* P. 1247, edit. 24. Huds. † P. 1080, edit. 45.
‡ P. 1327, edit. 43.

To which may be added one from Livy, lib. xi. c. 5. "Productique omnes, *virgisque cæsi*, ac securi percussi."

A modern example may illustrate the use we make of this instance. The preceding of a capital execution by the corporal punishment of the sufferer, is a practice unknown in England, but retained, in some instances at least, as appears by the late execution of a regicide, in Sweden. This circumstance, therefore, in the account of an English execution, purporting to come from an English writer, would not only bring a suspicion upon the truth of the account, but would, in a considerable degree, impeach its pretensions of having been written by the author whose name it bore. Whereas the same circumstance, in the account of a Swedish execution, would verify the account, and support the authenticity of the book in which it was found; or, at least, would prove that the author, whoever he was, possessed the information and the knowledge which he ought to possess.

XXVI. [p. 353.] John, xix. 16. "And they took Jesus, and led him away, and he, *bearing his cross*, went forth."

Plutarch De iis qui serò puniuntur, p. 554.: à Paris, 1624. "Every kind of wickedness produces its own particular torment, just as every malefactor, when he is brought forth to execution, *carries his own cross.*"

XXVII. John, xix. 32. "Then came the soldiers, and *brake the legs* of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him."

Constantine abolished the punishment of the cross; in commending which edict, a heathen writer notices this very circumstance of *breaking the legs:* Eò pius, ut etiam vetus veterrimumque supplicium, patibulum, et *cruribus suffringendis*, primus removerit." Aur. Vict. Ces. cap. xli.

XXVIII. [p. 457.] Acts, iii. 1. "Now Peter and John went up together into the

temple, at the hour of prayer, being the *ninth* hour."

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xv. c. 7. sect. 8. "Twice every day, in the morning and at the *ninth* hour, the priests perform their duty at the altar."

XXIX. [p. 462.] Acts, xv. 21. "For Moses, of old time, hath, in every city, them that preach him, *being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day*."

Joseph. contra Ap. l. ii. "He (Moses) gave us the law, the most excellent of all institutions; nor did he appoint that it should be heard, once only, or twice, or often, but that, laying aside all other works, we should meet together *every week* to hear it read, and gain a perfect understanding of it."

XXX. [p. 465.] Acts, xxi. 23. "We have four men, which have a *vow* on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, that they may *shave their heads*."

Joseph. de Bell. l. xi. c. 15. " It is customary for those who have been afflicted with some distemper, or have laboured under any other difficulties, to make a *vow* thirty days before they offer sacrifices, to abstain from wine, and *shave the hair of their heads.*"

Ib. v. 24. " Them take, and purify thyself with them, and *be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads.*"

Joseph. Antiq. l. xix. c. 6. " He (Herod Agrippa) coming to Jerusalem, offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving, and omitted nothing that was prescribed by the law. For which reason *he also ordered a good number of Nazarites to be shaved.*" We here find that it was an act of piety amongst the Jews, to defray for those who were under the Nazaritic vow the expenses which attended its completion; and that the phrase was, " that they might be shaved." The custom and the expression are both remarkable, and both in close conformity with the Scripture account.

XXXI. [p. 474.] 2 Cor. xi. 24. "Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, *save one.*"

Joseph. Antiq. iv. c. 8. sect. 21. "He that acts contrary hereto, let him receive forty stripes, *wanting one*, from the public officer."

The coincidence here is singular, because the law *allowed* forty stripes:—"Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed." Deut. xxv. 3. It proves that the author of the Epistle to the Corinthians was guided not by books, but by facts; because his statement agrees with the actual custom, even when that custom deviated from the written law, and from what he must have learnt by consulting the Jewish code, as set forth in the Old Testament.

XXXII. [p. 490.] Luke, iii. 12. "Then came also *publicans* to be baptized." From this quotation, as well as from the history of Levi or Matthew (Luke, v. 29.), and of Zaccheus (Luke, xix. 2.), it appears, that the publicans or tax-gatherers were,

frequently at least, if not always, Jews: which, as the country was then under a Roman government, and the taxes were paid to the Romans, was a circumstance not to be expected. That it was the truth however of the case, appears from a short passage of Josephus.

De Bell. lib. ii. c. 14. sect. 45.—"But, Florus not restraining these practices by his authority, the chief men of the Jews, *among whom was John the publican*, not knowing well what course to take, wait upon Florus, and give him eight talents of silver to stop the building."

XXXIII. [p. 496.] Acts, xxii. 25. "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you *to scourge a man that is a Roman*, and uncondemned?"

"Facinus est vinciri civem Romanum; scelus verberari." Cic. in Verr.

"Cædebatur virgis, in medio foro Messanæ, civis Romanus, Judices: cùm interea

nullus gemitus, nulla vox alia, istius miseri inter dolorem crepitumque plagarum audiebatur, nisi hæc, *Civis Romanus sum.*"

XXXIV. [p. 513.] Acts, xxii. 27. "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him (Paul), Tell me, Art thou a Roman? He said, Yea." The circumstance here to be noticed is, that a *Jew* was a Roman citizen.

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiv. c. 10. sect 13 "Lucius Lentulus, the consul, declared, I have dismissed from the service *the Jewish Roman citizens*, who observe the rites of the Jewish religion at Ephesus."

Ib. ver. 28. "And the chief captain answered, *With a great sum obtained I this freedom.*"

Dio Cassius, lib. lx. "This privilege which had been *bought formerly at a great price*, because so cheap, that it was commonly said, a man might be made a Roman citizen for a few pieces of broken glass."

XXXV. [p. 521.] Acts, xxviii. 16. "And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with *a soldier that kept him.*"

With which join ver. 20. "For the hope of Israel, I am bound with *this chain.*"

"Quemadmodùm eadem *catena* et custodiam et *militem* copulat; sic ista, quæ tam dissimilia sunt, pariter incedunt." Seneca, Ep. v.

"Proconsul æstimare solet, utrùm in carcerem recipienda sit persona, an *militi tradenda.*" Ulpian. l. i. sect. De Custod. et Exhib. Reor.

In the confinement of Agrippa by the order of Tiberius, Antonia managed, that the centurion who presided over the guards, and the *soldier to whom Agrippa was to be bound*, might be men of mild character. (Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 7. sect. 5.) After the accession of Caligula, Agrippa also, like

Paul, was suffered to dwell, yet as a prisoner, in his own house.

XXXVI. [p. 531.] Acts, xxvii. 1. "And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul, *and certain other prisoners*, unto one named Julius." Since not only Paul, but certain other *prisoners*, were sent by the same ship into Italy, the text must be considered as carrying with it an intimation, that the sending of persons from Judea to be tried at Rome, was an ordinary practice. That in truth it was so, is made out by a variety of examples which the writings of Josephus furnish; and, amongst others, by the following, which comes near both to the time and the subject of the instance in the Acts. "Felix, for some slight offence, *bound and sent to Rome* several priests of his acquaintance, and very good and honest men, to answer for themselves to Cæsar." Joseph. in Vit. sect. 3.

XXXVII. [p. 539.] Acts, xi. 27. "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one

of them, named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world (or all the country); *which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.*"

Joseph. Antiq. l. xx. c. 4. sect. 2. "In their time (*i. e.* about the fifth or sixth year of Claudius) a great dearth happened in Judea."

XXXVIII. [p. 555.] Acts, xviii. 1, 2. "Because that Claudious had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome."

Suet. Claud. c. xxv. "Judæos, impulsore Chresto assiduè tumultuantes, Româ expulit."

XXXIX. [p. 664.] Acts, v. 37. "After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him."

Joseph. de. Bell. l. vii. "He (*viz.* the person, who in another place is called, by

Josephus, Judas the Galilean or Judas of Galilee) persuaded not a few not to enrol themselves, when Cyrenius the censor was sent into Judea."

XL. [p. 942.] Acts, xxi. 38. "Art not thou that Egyptian which, before these days, madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?"

Joseph. de Bell. l. ii. c. 13. sect. 5. "But the Egyptian false prophet brought a yet heavier disaster upon the Jews; for this impostor, coming into the country, and gaining the reputation of a prophet, gathered together thirty thousand men, who were deceived by him. Having brought them round out of the wilderness, up to the mount of Olives, he intended from thence to make his attack upon Jerusalem; but Felix, coming suddenly upon him with the Roman soldiers, prevented the attack. ---A great number, or (as it should rather be rendered) the greatest part of those that were with him, were either slain or taken prisoners.

In these two passages, the designation of the impostor, an "Egyptian," without his proper name; "the wilderness;" his escape, though his followers were destroyed; the time of the transaction, in the presidentship of Felix, which could not be any long time before the words in Luke are supposed to have been spoken; are circumstances of close correspondency. There is one, and only one, point of disagreement, and that is, in the number of his followers, which in the Acts are called four thousand, and by Josephus thirty thousand: but, beside that the names of numbers, more than any other words, are liable to the errors of transcribers, we are, in the present instance, under the less concern to reconcile the evangelist with Josephus, as Josephus is not, in this point, consistent with himself. For whereas, in the passage here quoted, he calls the number thirty thousand, and tells us that the greatest part, or a great number (according as his words are rendered) of those that were with him, were destroyed; in his Antiquities, he represents four hundred to have been killed upon this occasion, and

two hundred taken prisoners*: which certainly was not the "greatest part," nor "a great part," nor "a great number," out of thirty thousand. It is probable also, that Lysias and Josephus spoke of the expedition in its different stages: Lysias, of those who followed the Egyptian out of Jerusalem; Josephus, of all who were collected about him afterwards, from different quarters.

XLI. (Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, vol. iii. p. 21.) Acts, xvii. 22. "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious; for, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, *I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.* Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

Diogenes Laërtius, who wrote about the year 210, in his history of Epimenides, who is supposed to have flourished nearly

* Lib. 20. c. 7. sect. 6.

six hundred years before Christ, relates of him the following story: that, being invited to Athens for the purpose, he delivered the city from a pestilence in this manner;—"Taking several sheep, some black, others white, he had them up to the Areopagus, and then let them go where they would, and gave orders to those who followed them, wherever any of them should lie down, to sacrifice it to the god to whom it belonged; and so the plague ceased.—Hence," says the historian, "it has come to pass, *that to this present time, may be found in the boroughs of the Athenians* ANONYMOUS *altars:* a memorial of the expiation then made*." These altars, it may be presumed, were called *anonymous*, because there was not the name of any particular deity inscribed upon them.

Pausanias, who wrote before the end of the second century, in his description of Athens, having mentioned an altar of Jupiter Olympius, adds, "*And nigh unto it is an altar of unknown gods*†." And in an-

* In Epimenide, l. i. segm. 110.

† Paus. l. v. p. 412.

other place, he speaks "*of altars of gods called unknown**."

Philostratus, who wrote in the beginning of the third century, records it as an observation of Apollonius Tyanæus, "That it was wise to speak well of all the gods, *especially at Athens, where altars of unknown demons were erected*†."

The *author of the dialogue Philopatris*, by many supposed to have been Lucian, who wrote about the year 170, by others some anonymous Heathen writer of the fourth century, makes Critias swear *by the unknown god of Athens;* and, near the end of the dialogue, has these words, "But let us find out *the unknown god at Athens*, and, stretching our hands to heaven, offer to him our praises and thanksgivings‡."

This is a very curious and a very important coincidence. It appears beyond controversy, that altars with this inscription

* Paus. l. i. p. 4.

† Philos. Apoll. Tyan. l. vi. c. 3.

‡ Lucian. in Philop. tom. ii. Græv. p. 767, 780.

were existing at Athens, at the time when Saint Paul is alleged to have been there. It seems also (which is very worthy of observation), that this inscription was *peculiar* to the Athenians. There is no evidence that there were altars inscribed "to the unknown god" in any other country. Supposing the history of Saint Paul to have been a fable, how is it possible that such a writer as the author of the Acts of the Apostles was, should hit upon a circumstance so extraordinary, and introduce it by an allusion so suitable to Saint Paul's office and character?

The examples here collected, will be sufficient, I hope, to satisfy us, that the writers of the Christian history knew something of what they were writing about. The argument is also strengthened by the following considerations:

I. That these agreements appear, not only in articles of public history, but some-

times, in minute, recondite, and very peculiar circumstances, in which, of all others, a forger is most likely to have been found tripping.

II. That the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place forty years after the commencement of the Christian institution, produced such a change in the state of the country, and the condition of the Jews, that a writer who was unacquainted with the circumstances of the nation *before* that event, would find it difficult to avoid mistakes, in endeavouring to give detailed accounts of transactions connected with those circumstances, forasmuch as he could no longer have a living exemplar to copy from.

III. That there appears, in the writers of the New Testament, a knowledge of the affairs of those times, which we do not find in authors of later ages. In particular, "many of the Christian writers of the second and third centuries, and of the following ages, had false notions concerning the state of Judea, between the nativity of

Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem*." Therefore *they* could not have composed our histories.

Amidst so many conformities, we are not to wonder that we meet with some difficulties. The principal of these I will put down, together with the solutions which they have received. But in doing this, I must be contented with a brevity better suited to the limits of my volume than to the nature of a controversial argument. For the historical proofs of my assertions, and for the Greek criticisms upon which some of them are founded, I refer the reader to the second volume of the first part of Dr. Lardner's large work.

I. The taxing during which Jesus was born, was "first made," as we read, according to our translation, in Saint Luke, "whilst Cyrenius was governor of Syria†." Now it turns out that Cyrenius was not governor of Syria until twelve, or, at the soonest, ten

* Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 960.

† Chap. ii. ver. 2.

years after the birth of Christ; and that a taxing, census, or assessment, was made in Judea in the beginning of his government. The charge, therefore, brought against the evangelist is, that, intending to refer to this taxing, he has misplaced the date of it by an error of ten or twelve years.

The answer to the accusation is found in his using the word "first:"—"And this taxing was *first* made:" for, according to the mistake imputed to the evangelist, this word could have no signification whatever; it could have had no place in his narrative; because, let it relate to what it will, taxing, census, enrolment, or assessment, it imports that the writer had more than one of those in contemplation. It acquits him therefore of the charge: it is inconsistent with the supposition of his knowing only of the taxing in the beginning of Cyrenius's government. And if the evangelist knew (which this word proves that he did) of some other taxing beside that, it is too much, for the sake of convicting him of a mistake, to lay it down as certain that he intended to refer to *that*.

The sentence in Saint Luke may be construed thus: "This was the first assessment (or enrolment) of Cyrenius, governor of Syria*;" the words "governor of Syria" being used after the name of Cyrenius as his addition or title. And this title belonging to him at the time of writing the account, was naturally enough subjoined to his name, though acquired after the transaction which the account describes. A modern writer who was not very exact in the choice of his expressions, in relating the affairs of the East-Indies, might easily say, that such a thing was done by *Governor* Hastings; though, in truth, the thing had been done by him before his advancement to the station from which he received the name of governor. And this, as we contend, is precisely the inaccuracy which has produced the difficulty in Saint Luke.

* If the word which we render "first," be rendered "before," which it has been strongly contended that the Greek idiom allows of, the whole difficulty vanishes: for then the passage would be,—"Now this taxing was made before Cyrenius was governor of Syria; which corresponds with the chronology. But I rather choose to argue, that, however the word "first" be rendered, to give it a meaning at all, it militates with the objection. In this I think there can be no mistake.

At any rate, it appears from the form of the expression, that he had two taxings or enrolments in contemplation. And if Cyrenius had been sent upon this business into Judea, before he became governor of Syria (against which supposition there is no proof, but rather external evidence of an enrolment going on about this time under some person or other*), then the census on all hands acknowledged to have been made by him in the beginning of his government, would form a second, so as to occasion the other to be called the *first*.

II. Another chronological objection arises upon a date assigned in the beginning of the third chapter of Saint Luke†. "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of

* Josephus (Antiq. xvii. c. 2. sect. 6.) has this remarkable passage: "When therefore the whole Jewish nation took an oath to be faithful to Cæsar, and the interests of the king." This transaction corresponds in the course of the history with the time of Christ's birth. What is called a census, and which we render taxing, was delivering upon oath an account of their property. This might be accompanied with an oath of fidelity, or might be mistaken by Josephus for it.

† Lardner, part. i. vol. ii. p. 768.

Tiberius Cæsar,—Jesus *began to be about thirty* years of age: for, supposing Jesus to have been born, as Saint Matthew, and Saint Luke also himself, relate, in the time of Herod, he must, according to the dates given in Josephus and by the Roman historians, have been at least thirty-one years of age in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. If he was born, as Saint Matthew's narrative intimates, one or two years before Herod's death, he would have been thirty-two or thirty-three years old at that time.

This is the difficulty: the solution turns upon an alteration in the construction of the Greek. Saint Luke's words in the original are allowed, by the general opinion of learned men, to signify, not "that Jesus began to about thirty years of age," but "that he was about thirty years of age when he began his ministry." This construction being admitted, the adverb "about" gives us all the latitude we want, and more, especially when applied, as it is in the present instance, to a decimal number: for such numbers, even without this

qualifying addition, are often used in a laxer sense than is here contended for*.

III. Acts, v. 36. "For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be some body; to whom a number of men, abour four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought."

Josephus has preserved the account of an impostor of the name of Theudas, who created some disturbances, and was slain; but according to the date assigned to this man's appearance (in which, however, it is very possible that Josephus may have been mistaken †), it must have been, at the

* Livy, speaking of the peace which the conduct of Romulus had procured to the state, during the *whole* reign of his successor (Numa), has these words ‡:—"Ab illo enim profectis viribus datis tantum valuit, ut, in *quadraginta* deinde annos, tutam pacem haberet:" yet afterwards in the same chapter, "Romulus," he says, "septem et triginta regnavit annos. Numa tres et quadraginta."

† Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Marsh's translation), vol. i. p. 61.

‡ Liv. Hist. c. i. sect. 16.

least, seven years after Gamaliel's speech, of which this text is a part, was delivered. It has been replied to the objection*, that there might be two impostors of this name: and it has been observed, in order to give a general probability to the solution, that the same thing appears to have happened in other instances of the same kind. It is proved from Josephus, that there were not fewer than four persons of the name of Simon within forty years, and not fewer than three of the name of Judas within ten years, who were all leaders of insurrections: and it is likewise recorded by this historian, that, upon the death of Herod the Great (which agrees very well with the time of the commotion referred to by Gamaliel, and with his manner of stating that time, "before these days"), there were innumerable disturbances in Judea†. Archbishop Usher was of opinion, that one of the three Judases above-mentioned was Gamaliel's Theudas‡; and that with a less variation of the name than we actually find in

* Lardner, part. i. vol. ii. p. 922.

† Antiq. l. xvii. c. 12. sect. 4.

‡ Annals, p. 797.

the Gospels, where one of the twelve apostles is called, by Luke, Judas; and by Mark, Thaddeus*. Origen, however he came at his information, appears to have believed that there was an impostor of the name of Theudas before the nativity of Christ†.

IV. Matt. xxiii. 34. "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of *Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*"

There is a Zacharias, whose death is related in the second book of Chronicles‡, in

* Luke, vi. 16. Mark, iii. 18.

† Orig. cont. Cels. p. 44.

‡ "And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the com-

a manner which perfectly supports our Saviour's allusion. But this Zacharias was the son of *Jehoiada*.

There is also Zacharias the prophet; who was the son of Barachiah, and is so described in the superscription of his prophecy, but of whose death we have no account.

I have little doubt, but that the first Zacharias was the person spoken of by our Saviour: and that the name of the father has been since added, or changed, by some one, who took it from the title of the prophecy, which happened to be better known to him than the history in the Chronicles.

There is likewise a Zacharias, the son of Baruch, related by Josephus to have been slain in the temple a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem. It has been in-

mandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, *and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord.*" 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21.

sinuated, that the words put into our Saviour's mouth contain a reference to this transaction, and were composed by some writer, who either confounded the time of the transaction with our Saviour's age, or inadvertently overlooked the anachronism.

Now suppose it to have been so; suppose these words to have been suggested by the transaction related in Josephus, and to have been falsely ascribed to Christ; and observe what extraordinary coincidences (accidentally, as it must in that case have been) attend the forger's mistake.

First, that we have a Zacharias in the book of Chronicles, whose death, and the manner of it, corresponds with the allusion.

Secondly, that although the name of this person's father be erroneously put down in the Gospel, yet we have a way of accounting for the error, by showing another Zacharias in the Jewish Scriptures, much better known than the former, whose patronymic was actually that which appears in the text.

Every one who thinks upon the subject, will find these to be circumstances which could not have met together in a mistake, which did not proceed from the circumstances themselves.

I have noticed, I think, all the difficulties of this kind. They are few; some of them admit of a clear, others of a probable solution. The reader will compare them with the number, the variety, the closeness, and the satisfactoriness, of the instances which are to be set against them; and he will remember the scantiness, in many cases, of our intelligence, and that difficulties always attend imperfect information.

CHAPTER VII.

Undesigned coincidences.

BETWEEN the letters which bear the name of Saint Paul in our collection, and his history in the Acts of the Apostles, there exist many notes of correspondency. The simple perusal of the writings is sufficient to prove that neither the history was taken from the letters, nor the letters from the history. And the *undesignedness* of the agreements (which undesignedness is gathered from their latency, their minuteness, their obliquity, the suitableness of the circumstances in which they consist, to the places in which those circumstances occur, and the circuitous references by which they are traced out) demonstrates that they have not been produced by meditation, or by any fraudulent contrivance. But coincidences, from which these causes are ex-

cluded, and which are too close and numerous to be accounted for by accidental concurrences of fiction, must necessarily have truth for their foundation.

This argument appeared to my mind of so much value (especially for its assuming nothing beside the existence of the books), that I have pursued it through Saint Paul's thirteen epistles, in a work published by me four years ago, under the title of Horæ Paulinæ. I am sensible how feebly any argument which depends upon an induction of particulars, is represented without examples. On which account, I wished to have abridged my own volume, in the manner in which I have treated Dr. Lardner's in the preceding chapter. But, upon making the attempt, I did not find it in my power to render the articles intelligible by fewer words than I have there used. I must be content, therefore, to refer the reader to the work itself. And I would particularly invite his attention to the observations which are made in it upon the first three epistles. I persuade myself that he will find the proofs, both of agreement

and undesignedness, supplied by these epistles, sufficient to support the conclusion which is there maintained, in favour both of the genuineness of the writings and the truth of the narrative.

It remains only, in this place, to point out how the argument *bears* upon the general question of the Christian history.

First, Saint Paul in these letters affirms, in unequivocal terms, his own performance of miracles, and, what ought particularly to be remembered, "*That miracles were the signs of an apostle**." If this testimony come from Saint Paul's own hand, it is invaluable. And that it does so, the argument before us fixes in my mind a firm assurance.

Secondly, it shows that the series of action, represented in the epistles of Saint Paul, was real; which alone lays a foundation for the proposition which forms the subject of the first part of our present

* Rom. xv. 18, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 12.

work, *viz.* that the original witnesses of the Christian history devoted themselves to lives of toil, suffering, and danger, in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history, and for the sake of communicating the knowledge of it to others.

Thirdly, it proves that Luke, or whoever was the author of the Acts of the Apostles (for the argument does not depend upon the name of the author, though I know no reason for questioning it), was well acquainted with Saint Paul's history; and that he probably was, what he professes himself to be, a companion of Saint Paul's travels: which, if true, establishes, in a considerable degree, the credit even of his Gospel, because it shows, that the writer, from his time, situation, and connexions, possessed opportunities of informing himself truly concerning the transactions which he relates. I have little difficulty in applying to the Gospel of Saint Luke what is proved concerning the Acts of the Apostles, considering them as two parts of the same history; for, though there are instances of *second* parts being forgeries, I

know none where the second part is genuine, and the first not so.

I will only observe, as a sequel of the argument, though not noticed in my work, the remarkable similitude between the style of Saint John's Gospel, and of Saint John's Epistle. The style of Saint John's is not at all the style of Saint Paul's epistles, though both are very singular; nor is it the style of Saint James's or of Saint Peter's Epistle: but it bears a resemblance to the style of the Gospel inscribed with Saint John's name, so far as that resemblance can be expected to appear which is not in simple narrative, so much as in reflections, and in the representation of discourses. Writings so circumstanced, prove themselves, and one another, to be genuine. This correspondency is the more valuable, as the epistle itself asserts, in Saint John's manner indeed, but in terms sufficiently explicit, the writer's personal knowledge of Christ's history: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have

handled, of the word of life; that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you*." Who would not desire,—who perceives not the value of an account, delivered by a writer so well informed as this?

* Ch. i. ver. 1—3.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the history of the resurrection.

THE history ofthe resurrection of Christ is a part of the evidence of Christianity: but I do not know, whether the proper strength of this passage of the Christian history, or wherein its peculiar value, as a head of evidence, consists, be generally understood. It is not that, as a miracle, the resurrection ought to be accounted a more decisive proof of supernatural agency than other miracles are; it is not that, as it stands in the Gospels, it is better attested than some others; it is not, for either of these reasons, that more weight belongs to it than to other miracles, but for the following, *viz.* That it is completely certain that the apostles of Christ, and the first teachers of Christianity, asserted the fact. And this would have been certain, if the four Gospels had been lost, or never written. Every piece of Scripture recognises the resurrection. Every epistle of every apostle,

every author contemporary with the apostles, of the age immediately succeeding the apostles, every writing from that age to the present, genuine or spurious, on the side of Christianity or against it, concur in representing the resurrection of Christ as an article of his history, received without doubt or disagreement by all who called themselves Christians, as alleged from the beginning by the propagators of the institution, and alleged as the centre of their testimony. Nothing, I apprehend, which a man does not himself see or hear, can be more certain to him than this point. I do not mean, that nothing can be more certain, than that Christ rose from the dead; but that nothing can be more certain, than that his apostles, and the first teachers of Christianity, gave out that he did so. In the other parts of the Gospel narrative, a question may be made, whether the things related of Christ be the very things which the apostles and first teachers of the religion delivered concerning him? And this question depends a good deal upon the evidence we possess of the genuineness, or rather, perhaps, of the antiquity, credit,

and reception of the books. On the subject of the resurrection, no such discussion is necessary, because no such doubt can be entertained. The only points which can enter into our consideration are, whether the apostles knowingly published a falsehood, or whether they were themselves deceived; whether either of these suppositions be possible. The first, I think, is pretty generally given up. The nature of the undertaking, and of the men; the extreme unlikelihood that such men should engage in such a measure as a *scheme;* their personal toils, and dangers, and sufferings, in the cause; their appropriation of their whole time to the object; the warm and seemingly unaffected zeal and earnestness with which they profess their sincerity; exempt their memory from the suspicion of imposture. The solution more deserving of notice, is that which would resolve the conduct of the apostles into *enthusiasm;* which would class the evidence of Christ's resurrection with the numerous stories that are extant of the apparitions of dead men. There are circumstances in the narrative, as it is preserved in our histories, which destroy this

comparison entirely. It was not one person, but many, who saw him; they saw him not only separately but together, not only by night but by day, not at a distance but near, not once but several times; they not only saw him, but touched him, conversed with him, ate with him, examined his person to satisfy their doubts. These particulars are decisive: but they stand, I do admit, upon the credit of our records. I would answer, therefore, the insinuation of enthusiasm, by a circumstance which arises out of the nature of the thing; and the reality of which must be confessed by all who allow, what I believe is not denied, that the resurrection of Christ, whether true or false, was asserted by his disciples from the beginning; and that circumstance is, the non-production of the dead body. It is related in the history, what indeed the story of the resurrection necessarily implies, that the corpse was missing out of the sepulchre: it is related also in the history, that the Jews reported that the followers of Christ had stolen it away *. And this ac-

* "And this saying," Saint Matthew writes, "is commonly reported amongst the Jews until this day," (chap.

count, though loaded with great improbabilities, such as the situation of the disciples, their fears for their own safety at the time, the unlikelihood of their expecting to succeed, the difficulty of actual success*, and the inevitable consequence of detection and failure, was, nevertheless, the most credible accout that could be given of the matter. But it proceeds entirely upon the supposition of fraud, as all the old objections did. What account can be given of the *body*, upon the supposition of en-

xxviii. 15.). The evangelist may be thought good authority as to this point, even by those who do not admit his evidence in every other point: and this point is sufficient to prove that the body was missing.

It has been rightly, I think, observed by Dr. Townshend (Dis. upon the Res. p. 126.), that the story of the guards carried collusion upon the face of it:—"His disciples came by night, and stole him away, while we slept." Men in their circumstances would not have made such an acknowledgement of their negligence, without previous assurances of protection and impunity.

* "Especially at the full moon, the city full of people, many probably passing the whole night, as Jesus and his disciples had done, in the open air, the sepulchre so near the city as to be now enclosed within the walls." Priestley on the Resurr. p. 24.

thusiasm? It is impossible our Lord's followers could believe that he was risen from the dead, if his corpse was lying before them. No enthusiasm ever reached to such a pitch of extravagancy as that: a spirit may be an illusion; a body is a real thing, an object of sense, in which there can be no mistake. All accounts of spectres leave the body in the grave. And, although the body of Christ might be removed by *fraud*, and for the purposes of fraud, yet, without any such intention, and by sincere but deluded men (which is the representation of the apostolic character we are now examining), no such attempt could be made. The presence and the absence of the dead body are alike inconsistent with the hypothesis of enthusiasm; for, if present, it must have cured their enthusiasm at once; if absent, fraud, not enthusiasm, must have carried it away.

But further, if we admit, upon the concurrent testimony of all the histories, so much of the account as states that the religion of Jesus was set up at Jerusalem, and set up with asserting, in the very

place in which he had been buried, and a few days after he had been buried, his resurrection out of the grave, it is evident that, if his body could have been found, the Jews would have produced it, as the shortest and completest answer possible to the whole story. The attempt of the apostles could not have survived this refutation a moment. If we also admit, upon the authority of Saint Matthew, that the Jews were advertised of the expectation of Christ's followers, and that they had taken due precaution in consequence of this notice, and that the body was in marked and public custody, the observation receives more force still. For, notwithstanding their precaution, and although thus prepared and forewarned; when the story of the resurrection of Christ came forth, as it immediately did; when it was publicly asserted by his disciples, and made the ground and basis of their preaching in his name, and collecting followers to his religion, the Jews had not the body to produce: but were obliged to meet the testimony of the apostles by an answer,

not containing indeed any impossibility in itself, but absolutely inconsistent with the supposition of their integrity; that is, in other words, inconsistent with the supposition which would resolve their conduct into enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IX.

The propagation of Christianity.

In this argument, the first consideration is the fact; in what degree, within what time, and to what extent, Christianity actually was propagated.

The accounts of the matter, which can be collected from our books, are as follow: A *few days* after Christ's disappearance out of the world, we find an assembly of disciples at Jerusalem, to the number of "about one hundred and twenty*;" which hundred and twenty were, probably, a little association of believers, met together, not merely as believers in Christ, but as personally connected with the apostles, and with one another. Whatever was the number of believers then in Jerusalem, we have no reason to be surprised that so small a company

* Acts, i. 15.

should assemble: for there is no proof, that the followers of Christ were yet formed into a society; that the society was reduced into any order; that it was at this time even understood that a new religion (in the sense which that term conveys to us) was to be set up in the world, or how the professors of that religion were to be distinguished from the rest of mankind. The death of Christ had left, we may suppose, the generality of his disciples in great doubt, both as to what they were to do, and concerning what was to follow.

This meeting was holden, as we have already said, a few days after Christ's ascension: for, ten days after that event was the day of Pentecost, when, as our history relates *, upon a signal display of Divine agency attending the persons of the apostles, there were added to the society "about three thousand souls †." But here, it is not, I think, to be taken, that these three thousand were all converted by this single miracle; but rather that many, who before

* Acts, ii. 1. † Acts, ii. 41.

were believers in Christ, became now professors of Christianity; that is to say, when they found that a religion was to be established, a society formed and set up in the name of Christ, governed by his laws, avowing their belief in his mission, united amongst themselves, and separated from the rest of the world, by visible distinctions; in pursuance of their former conviction, and by virtue of what they had heard and seen and known of Christ's history, they publicly became members of it.

We read in the fourth chapter* of the Acts, that, soon after this, "the number of the men," *i. e.* the society openly professing their belief in Christ, "was about five thousand." So that here is an increase of two thousand within a very short time. And it is probable that there were many, both now and afterwards, who, although they believed in Christ, did not think it necessary to join themselves to this society; or who waited to see what was likely to become of it. Gamaliel, whose advice to the

* Verse 4.

Jewish council is recorded Acts, v. 34. appears to have been of this description; perhaps Nicodemus, and perhaps also Joseph of Arimathea. This class of men, their character and their rank, are likewise pointed out by Saint John, in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel: "Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also, many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Persons such as these, might admit the miracles of Christ, without being immediately convinced that they were under obligation to make a public profession of Christianity, at the risk of all that was dear to them in life, and even of life itself*.

* "Beside those who professed, and those who rejected and opposed, Christianity; there were, in all probability, multitudes between both, neither perfect Christians, nor yet unbelievers. They had a favourable opinion of the Gospel, but worldly considerations made them unwilling to own it. There were many circumstances which inclined them to think that Christianity was a Divine revelation, but there were many inconveniences which attended the open profession of it: and they could not find in themselves courage enough to bear them, to disoblige their friends and fa-

Christianity, however, proceeded to increase in Jerusalem by a progress equally rapid with its first success; for, in the next* chapter of our history, we read that "believers were the more added to the Lord, *multitudes* both of men and women." And this enlargement of the new society appears in the first verse of the succeeding chapter, wherein we are told, that, "when the number of the diciples was *multiplied*, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected†:" and, afterwards in the same chapter, it is declared expressly, that "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

mily, to ruin their fortunes, to lose their reputation, their liberty, and their life, for the sake of the new religion. Therefore they were willing to hope, that if they endeavoured to observe the great principles of morality, which Christ had represented as the principal part, the sum and substance, of religion; if they thought honourably of the Gospel; if they offered no injury to the Christians; if they did them all the services that they could *safely* perform; they were willing to hope, that God would accept this, and that He would excuse and forgive the rest." Jortin's Dis. on the Christ. Rel. p. 91. ed. 4.

* Acts, v. 14. † Acts, vi. 1.

This I call the first period in the propagation of Christianity. It commences with the ascension of Christ, and extends, as may be collected from incidental notes of time*, to something more than one year after that event. During which term, the preaching of Christianity, so far as our documents inform us, was confined to the single city of Jerusalem. And how did it succeed there? The first assembly which we meet with of Christ's disciples, and that a few days after his removal from the world, consisted of "one hundred and twenty." About a week after this, "three thousand were added in one day;" and the number of Christians, publicly baptized, and publicly associating together, was very soon increased to "five thousand." "Multitudes both of men and women continued to be added;" "disciples multiplied greatly," and "many of the Jewish priesthood, as well as others, became obedient to the faith;" and this within a space of

* Vide Pearson's Antiq. l. xviii. c. 7. Benson's History of Christ, book i. p. 148.

less than two years from the commencement of the institution.

By reason of a persecution raised against the church at Jerusalem, the converts were driven from that city, and dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*. Wherever they came, they brought their religion with them: for, our historian informs us†, that "they, that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word." The effect of this preaching comes afterwards to be noticed, where the historian is led, in the course of his narrative, to observe, that *then* (*c. e.* about three years‡ posterior to this) "the churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." This was the work of the second period, which comprises about four years.

Hitherto the preaching of the Gospel had been confined to Jews, to Jewish

* Acts, viii. 1. † Verse 4. ‡ Benson, book i. p. 207.

proselytes, and to Samaritans. And I cannot forbear from setting down in this place, an observation of Mr. Bryant, which appears to me to be perfectly well founded; —"The Jews still remain: but how seldom is it that we can make a single proselyte! There is reason to think, that there were more converted by the apostles in one day, than have since been won over in the last thousand years*."

It was not yet known to the apostles, that they were at liberty to propose the religion to mankind at large. That "mystery," as Saint Paul calls it†, and as it then was, was revealed to Peter by an especial miracle. It appears to have been‡ about seven years after Christ's ascension, that the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles of Cesarea. A year after this, a great multitude of Gentiles were converted at Antioch in Syria. The expressions employed by the historian are these:—"A great number believed, and turned to the Lord;"

* Bryant on the Truth of the Christian Religion, p. 112.
† Eph. iii. 3—6. ‡ Benson, book ii. p. 236.

"much people was added unto the Lord;" "the apostles Barnabas and Paul taught much people*." Upon Herod's death, which happened in the next year†, it is observed, that "the word of God grew and multiplied‡." Three years from this time, upon the preaching of Paul at Iconium, the metropolis of Lycaonia, "a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed§:" and afterwards, in the course of this very progress, he is represented as "making many disciples" at Derbe, a principal city in the same district. Three years‖ after this, which brings us to sixteen after the ascension, the apostles wrote a public letter from Jerusalem to the Gentile converts in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, with which letter Paul travelled through these countries, and found the churches "established in the faith, and increasing in number daily¶." From Asia, the apostle proceeded into Greece, where, soon after his arrival in Macedonia, we find him at Thessalo-

* Acts, xi. 21. 24. 26.
† Benson, book ii. p. 289.
‡ Acts, xii. 24.
§ Ibid. xiv. 1.
‖ Benson's History of Christ, book iii. p. 50.
¶ Acts, xvi. 5.

nica; in which city, "some of the Jews believed, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude*." We meet also here with an accidental hint of the general progress of the Christian mission, in the exclamation of the tumultuous Jews of Thessalonica, "that they, who had turned the world upside down, were come thither also†." At Berea, the next city at which Saint Paul arrives, the historian, who was present, informs us that "*many* of the Jews believed ‡." The next year and a half of Saint Paul's ministry was spent at Corinth. Of his success in that city, we receive the following intimations; "that *many* of the Corinthians believed and were baptized;" and "that it was revealed to the apostle by Christ, that he had *much* people in that city§." Within less than a year after his departure from Corinth, and twenty-five‖ years after the ascension, Saint Paul fixed his station at Ephesus, for the space of two years¶ and something more. The effect of his ministry

* Acts, xvii. 4. † Ib. xvii. 6. ‡ Ib. xvii. 12.
§ Ib. xviii. 8—10. ‖ Benson, book iii. p. 160.
¶ Acts, xix. 10.

in that city and neighbourhood drew from the historian a reflection, how "mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*." And at the conclusion of this period, we find Demetrius at the head of a party, who were alarmed by the progress of the religion, complaining, that "not only at Ephesus, but also throughout all Asia (*i. e.* the province of Lydia, and the country adjoining to Ephesus), this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people†." Beside these accounts, there occurs, incidentally, mention of converts at Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Cyprus, Cyrene, Macedonia, Philippi.

This is the third period in the propagation of Christianity, setting off in the seventh year after the Ascension, and ending at the twenty-eighth. Now, lay these three periods together, and observe how the progress of the religion by these accounts is represented. The institution, which properly *began* only after its author's removal from the world, before the end of thirty

* Acts, xix. 20. † Ib. ver. 26.

years had spread itself through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, almost all the numerous districts of the Lesser Asia, through Greece, and the islands of the Ægean Sea, the sea-coast of Africa, and had extended itself to Rome, and into Italy. At Antioch in Syria, at Joppa, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Berea, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Pisidia, at Lydda, Saron, the number of converts is intimated by the expressions, "a great number," "great multitudes," "much people." Converts are mentioned, without any designation of their number*, at Tyre, Cesarea, Troas, Athens, Philippi, Lystra, Damascus. During all this time, Jerusalem continued not only the centre of the mission, but a principal seat of the religion;

* Considering the extreme conciseness of many parts of the history, the silence about the numbers of converts is no proof of their paucity; for at Philippi, no mention whatever is made of the number, yet Saint Paul addressed an epistle to that church. The churches of Galatia, and the affairs of those churches, were considerable enough to be the subject of another letter, and of much of Saint Paul's solicitude: yet no account is preserved in the history of his success, or even of his preaching in that country, except the slight notice which these words convey:—"When they had gone throughout Phrygia, and the region of Galatia---they essayed to go into Bithynia." Acts, xvi. 6.

for when Saint Paul turned thither at the conclusion of the period of which we are now considering the accounts, the other apostles pointed out to him, as a reason for his compliance with their advice, "how many thousands (myriads, ten thousands) there were in that city who believed*."

Upon this abstract, and the writing from which it is drawn, the following observations seem material to be made:

I. That the account comes from a person, who was himself concerned in a portion of what he relates, and was contemporary with the whole of it; who visited Jerusalem, and frequented the society of those who had acted, and were acting the chief parts in the transaction. I lay down this point positively; for had the ancient attestations to this valuable record been less satisfactory than they are, the unaffectedness and simplicity with which the author notes his presence upon certain occasions, and the entire absence of art and design from these notices,

* Acts, xxi. 20.

would have been sufficient to persuade my mind, that whoever he was, he actually lived in the times, and occupied the situation, in which he represents himself to be. When I say "whoever he was," I do not mean to cast a doubt upon the name to which antiquity hath ascribed the Acts of the Apostles (for there is no cause that I am acquainted with, for questioning it), but to observe, that, in such a case as this, the time and situation of the author is of more importance than his name; and that *these* appear from the work itself, and in the most unsuspicious form.

II. That this account is a very *incomplete* account of the preaching and propagation of Christianity; I mean, that, if what we read in the history be true, much more than what the history contains must be true also. For, although the narrative from which our information is derived, has been entitled the Acts of the Apostles, it is in fact a history of the twelve apostles only during a short time of their continuing together at Jerusalem; and even of this period the account is very concise. The work afterwards

consists of a few important passages of Peter's ministry, of the speech and death of Stephen, of the preaching of Philip the deacon; and the sequel of the volume, that is, two thirds of the whole, is taken up with the conversion, the travels, the discourses, and history of the new apostle, Paul; in which history also, large portions of time are often passed over with very scanty notice.

III. That the account, so far as it goes, is for this very reason more credible. Had it been the author's design to have *displayed* the early progress of Christianity, he would undoubtedly have collected, or, at least, have set forth, accounts of the preaching of the rest of the apostles, who cannot, without extreme improbability, be supposed to have remained silent and inactive, or not to have met with a share of that success which attended their colleagues. To which may be added, as an observation of the same kind,

IV. That the intimations of the number of converts, and of the success of the preach-

ing of the apostles, come out for the most part *incidentally;* are drawn from the historian by the occasion; such as the murmuring of the Grecian converts; the rest from persecution; Herod's death; the sending of Barnabas to Antioch, and Barnabas calling Paul to his assistance; Paul coming to a place, and finding there disciples; the clamour of the Jews; the complaint of artificers interested in the support of the popular religion; the reason assigned to induce Paul to give satisfaction to the Christians of Jerusalem. Had it not been for these occasions, it is probable that no notice whatever would have been taken of the number of converts in several of the passages in which that notice now appears. All this tends to remove the suspicion of a design to exaggerate or deceive.

PARALLEL TESTIMONIES with the history, are the letters of Saint Paul, and of the other apostles, which have come down to us. Those of Saint Paul are addressed to the churches of Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, the church of Galatia, and, if the inscription be right, of Ephesus; his ministry at all

which places, is recorded in the history: to the church of Colosse, or rather to the churches of Colosse and Laodicea jointly, which he had not then visited. They recognise by reference the churches of Judea, the churches of Asia, and "all the churches of the Gentiles*." In the epistle† to the Romans, the author is led to deliver a remarkable declaration concerning the extent of his preaching, its efficacy, and the cause to which he ascribes it,—"to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ." In the Epistle to the Colossians‡, we find an oblique but very strong signification of the then general state of the Christian mission, at least as it appeared to Saint Paul:—"If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and *which was preached to every creature which is*

* 1 Thess. ii. 14.

† Rom. xv. 18, 19.

‡ Col. i. 23.

under heaven;" which Gospel, he had reminded them near the beginning* of his letter, "was present with them, *as it was in all the world.*" The expressions are hyperbolical; but they are hyperboles which could only be used by a writer who entertained a strong sense of the subject. The first epistle of Peter accosts the Christians dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

It comes next to be considered, how far these accounts are confirmed, or followed up, by other evidence.

Tacitus, in delivering a relation, which has already been laid before the reader, of the fire which happened at Rome in the tenth year of Nero (which coincides with the thirtieth year after Christ's ascension), asserts, that the emperor, in order to suppress the rumours of having been himself the author of the mischief, procured the Christians

* Col. i. 6.

to be accused. Of which Christians, thus brought into his narrative, the following is so much of the historian's account, as belongs to our present purpose: "They had their denomination from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate This pernicious superstition, though checked for a while, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, but reached the city also At first, they only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterwards *a vast multitude* were discovered by them." This testimony to the early propagation of Christianity is extremely material. It is from an historian of great reputation, living near the time; from a stranger and an enemy to the religion; and it joins immediately with the period through which the Scripture accounts extend. It establishes these points: that the religion began at Jerusalem: that it spread throughout Judea; that it had reached Rome, and not only so, but that it had there obtained a great number of converts. This was about six years after the time that Saint Paul wrote his Epistle

to the Romans, and something more than two years after he arrived there himself. The converts to the religion were then so numerous at Rome, that, of those who were betrayed by the information of the persons first persecuted, a great multitude (multitudo ingens) were discovered and seized.

It seems probable, that the temporary check with Tacitus represents Christianity to have received (repressa in præsens) referred to the persecution at Jerusalem, which followed the death of Stephen (Acts, viii.); and which, by dispersing the converts, caused the institution, in some measure, to disappear. Its second eruption at the same place, and within a short time, has much in it of the character of truth. It was the firmness and perseverance of men who knew what they relied upon.

Next, in order of time, and perhaps superior in importance, is the testimony of Pliny the Younger. Pliny was the Roman governor of Pontus and Bithynia, two considerable districts in the northern part of Asia

Minor. The situation in which he found his province, led him to apply to the emperor (Trajan) for his direction as to the conduct he was to hold towards the Christians. The letter in which this application is contained, was written not quite eighty years after Christ's ascension. The president, in this letter, states the measures he had already pursued, and then adds, as his reason for resorting to the emperor's counsel and authority, the following words:—"Suspending all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice; for it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering: for, many of all ages, and of every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country. Nevertheless it seemed to me, that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims, likewise, are every-

where (passim) bought up; whereas, for some time, there were few to purchase them. Whence it is easy to imagine, that numbers of men might be reclaimed, if pardon were granted to those that shall repent*."

It is obvious to observe, that the passage of Pliny's letter, here quoted, proves, not only that the Christians in Pontus and Bithynia were now numerous, but that they had subsisted there for some considerable time. "It is certain," he says, "that the temples, which were almost forsaken (plainly ascribing this desertion of the popular worship to the prevalency of Christianity), begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a *long* intermission, are revived." There are also two clauses in the former part of the letter which indicate the same thing; one, in which he declares that he had "never been present at any trials of Christians, and therefore knew not what was the usual subject of inquiry and punishment, or how far either was wont to be urged." The second clause is the following:

* C. Plin. Trajano Imp. lib. x. ep. xcvii.

"Others were named by an informer, who, at first, confessed themselves Christians, and afterwards denied it; the rest said, they had been Christians, some three years ago, some longer, and some above twenty years." It is also apparent, that Pliny speaks of the Christians as a description of men well known to the person to whom he writes. His first sentence concerning them is, "I have never been present at the trials of Christians." This mention of the name of Christians, without any preparatory explanation, shows that it was a term familiar both to the writer of the letter, and the person to whom it was addressed. Had it not been so, Pliny would naturally have begun his letter by informing the emperor, that he had met with a certain set of men in the province, called Christians.

Here then is a very singular evidence of the progress of the Christian religion in a short space. It was not fourscore years after the crucifixion of Jesus, when Pliny wrote this letter; nor seventy years since the apostles of Jesus began to mention his name to the Gentile world. Bithynia and

Pontius were at a great distance from Judea, the centre from which the religion spread; yet in these provinces, Christianity had long subsisted, and Christians were now in such numbers as to lead the Roman governor to report to the emperor, that they were found not only in cities, but in villages and in open countries; of all ages, of every rank and condition; that they abounded so much, as to have produced a visible desertion of the temples; that beasts brought to market for victims, had few purchasers; that the sacred solemnities were much neglected:—circumstances noted by Pliny, for the express purpose of showing to the emperor the effect and prevalency of the new institution.

No evidence remains, by which it can be proved that the Christians were more numerous in Pontus and Bithynia than in other parts of the Roman empire; nor has any reason been offered to show why they should be so. Christianity did not begin in these countries, nor near them. I do not know, therefore, that we ought to confine the description in Pliny's letter to the state of Christianity in those provinces, even if no

other account of the same subject had come down to us: but, certainly, this letter may fairly be applied in aid and confirmation of the representations given of the general state of Christianity in the world, by Christian writers of that and the next succeeding age.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about thirty years after Pliny, and one hundred and six after the Ascension, has these remarkable words: "There is not a nation, either of Greek or Barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes, and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the Universe by the name of the crucified Jesus*." Tertullian, who comes about fifty years after Justin, appeals to the governors of the Roman empire in these terms: "We were but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, islands, towns, and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum. They (the heathen adversaries of Christianity) lament, that every sex, age,

* Dial cum Tryph.

and condition, and persons of every rank also, are converts to that name*." I do allow that these expressions are loose, and may be called declamatory. But even declamation hath its bounds; this public boasting upon a subject which must be known to every reader, was not only useless but unnatural, unless the truth of the case, in a considerable degree, correspond with the description; at least, unless it had been both true and notorious, that great multitudes of Christians, of all ranks and orders, were to be found in most parts of the Roman empire. The same Tertullian, in another passage, by way of setting forth the extensive diffusion of Christianity, enumerates as belonging to Christ, beside many other countries, the "Moors and Gætulians of Africa, the borders of Spain, several nations of France, and parts of Britain, inaccessible to the Romans, the Sarmatians, Daci, Germans, and Scythians†;" and, which is more material than the extent of the institution, the *number* of Christians in the several countries in which it prevailed, is thus expressed by

* Tertull. Apol. c. 37. † Ad Jud. c. 7.

him: "Although so great a multitude that in almost every city we form the greater part, we pass our time modestly and in silence*." Clemens Alexandrinus, who preceded Tertullian by a few years, introduces a comparison between the success of Christianity, and that of the most celebrated philosophical institutions: "The philosophers were confined to Greece, and to their particular retainers; but the doctrine of the Master of Christianity did not remain in Judea, as philosophy did in Greece, but is spread throughout the whole world, in every nation, and village, and city, both of Greeks and barbarians, converting both whole houses and separate individuals, having already brought over to the truth not a few of the philosophers themselves. If the Greek philosophy be prohibited, it immediately vanishes; whereas, from the first preaching of *our* doctrine, kings and tyrants, governors and presidents, with their whole train, and with the populace on their side, have endeavoured with their whole might to exter-

* Ad Scap. c. III.

minate it, yet doth it flourish more and more*." Origen, who follows Tertullian at the distance of only thirty years, delivers nearly the same account: "In every part of the world," says he, "throughout all Greece, and in all other nations, there are innumerable and immense multitudes, who, having left the laws of their country, and those whom they esteemed gods, have given themselves up to the law of Moses, and the religion of Christ: and this not without the bitterest resentment from the idolaters, by whom they were frequently put to torture, and sometimes to death: and it is wonderful to observe, how, in so short a time, the religion has increased, amidst punishment and death, and every kind of torture†." In another passage, Origen draws the following candid comparison between the state of Christianity in his time, and the condition of its more primitive ages: "By the good providence of God, the Christian religion has so flourished and increased continually, that it is now preached freely without molestation,

* Clem. Al. Strom. lib. vi. ad fin.

† Orig. in Cels. lib. i.

although there were a thousand obstacles to the spreading of the doctrine of Jesus in the world. But as it was the will of God that the Gentiles should have the benefit of it, all the councils of men against the Christians were defeated: and by how much the more emperors and governors of provinces, and the people every where, strove to depress them; so much the more have they increased, and prevailed exceedingly*."

It is well known, that within less than eighty years after this, the Roman empire became Christian under Constantine: and it is probable that Constantine declared himself on the side of the Christians, because they were the powerful party; for Arnobius, who wrote immediately before Constantine's accession speaks of the whole world as filled with Christ's doctrine, of its diffusion throughout all countries, of an innumerable body of Christians in distant provinces, of the strange revolution of opinion of men of the greatest ge-

* Orig. cont. Cels. lib. vii.

nius, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, having come over to the institution, and that also in the face of threats, executions, and tortures*." And not more than twenty years after Constantine's entire possession of the empire, Julius Firmicus Maternus calls upon the emperors Constantius and Constans to extirpate the relics of the ancient religion; the reduced and fallen condition of which is described by our author in the following words: "Licèt adhuc in quibusdam regionibus idololatriæ morientia palpitent membra; tamen in eo res est, ut à Christianis omnibus terris pestiferum hoc malum funditùs amputetur:" and in another place "Modicum tantum superest, ut legibus vestris —extincta idololatriæ pereat funesta contagio†." It will not be thought that we quote this writer in order to recommend his temper or his judgement, but to show the comparative state of Christianity and of Heathenism at this period. Fifty years

* Arnob. in Gentes, l. i. p. 27. 9. 24. 42. 44. edit. Lug. Bat. 1650.

† De Error. Profan. Relig. c. xxi. p. 172. quoted by Lardner, vol. viii. p. 262.

afterwards, Jerome represents the decline of Paganism in language which conveys the same idea of its approaching extinction: "Solitudinem patitur et in urbe gentilitas. Dii quondam nationum, cum bubonibus et noctuis, in solis culminibus remanserunt*." Jerome here indulges a triumph, natural and allowable in a zealous friend of the cause, but which could only be suggested to his mind by the consent and universality with which he saw the religion received. "But now," says he, "the passion and resurrection of Christ are celebrated in the discourses and writings of all nations. I need not mention Jews, Greeks and Latins. The Indians, Persians, Goths, and Egyptians, philosophize, and firmly believe the immortality of the soul, and future recompenses, which, before, the greatest philosophers had denied, or doubted of, or perplexed with their disputes. The fierceness of Thracians and Scythians is now softened by the gentle sound of the Gospel; and every where Christ is all in all†." Were therefore the

* Jer. ad Lect. ep. 5. 7. † Jer. ep. 8. ad Heliod.

motives of Constantine's conversion ever so problematical, the easy establishment of Christianity, and the ruin of Heathenism under him and his immediate successors, is of itself a proof of the progress which Christianity had made in the preceding period. It may be added also, "that Maxentius, the rival of Constantine, had shown himself friendly to the Christians. Therefore of those who were contending for worldly power and empire, one actually favoured and flattered them, and another may be suspected to have joined himself to them, partly from consideration of interest: so considerable were they become, under external disadvantages of all sorts*." This at least is certain, that throughout the whole transaction hitherto, the great seemed to follow, not to lead, the public opinion.

It may help to convey to us some notion of the extent and progress of Christianity, or rather of the character and quality of many early Christians, of their learning

* Lardner, vol. vii. p. 380.

and their labours, to notice the number of Christian *writers* who flourished in these ages. Saint Jerome's catalogue contains *sixty-six* writers within the first three centuries, and the first six years of the fourth; and *fifty-four* between that time and his own, *viz.* A. D. 392. Jerome introduces his catalogue with the following just remonstrance:—"Let those who say the church has had no philosophers, nor eloquent and learned men, observe who and what they were who founded, established, and adorned it: let them cease to accuse our faith of rusticity, and confess their mistake*." Of these writers, several, as Justin, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Bardesanes, Hippolitus, Eusebius, were voluminous writers. Christian writers abounded particularly about the year 178. Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, founded a library in that city, A. D. 212. Pamphilus, the friend of Origen, founded a library at Cesarea, A. D. 294. Public defences were also set forth, by various advocates of the religion, in the course of its

* Jer. Prol. in Lib. de Scr. Eccl.

first three centuries. Within one hundred years after Christ's ascension, Quadratus and Aristides, whose works, except some few fragments of the first, are lost; and, about twenty years afterwards, Justin Martyr, whose works remain, presented apologies for the Christian religion to the Roman emperors; Quadratus and Aristides to Adrian, Justin to Antoninus Pius, and a second to Marcus Antoninus. Melito, bishop of Sardis, and Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, and Miltiades, men of great reputation, did the same to Marcus Antoninus, twenty years afterwards*: and ten years after this, Apollonius, who suffered martyrdom under the emperor Commodus, composed an apology for his faith, which he read in the senate, and which was afterwards published†. Fourteen years after the apology of Apollonius, Tertullian addressed the work which now remains under that name to the governors of provinces in the Roman empire; and, about the same time, Minucius Felix com-

* Euseb. Hist. lib. iv. c. 26. See also Lardner, vol. ii. p. 666.

† Lardner, vol. ii. p. 687.

posed a defence of the Christian religion, which is still extant; and, shortly after the conclusion of this century, copious defences of Christianity were published by Arnobius and Lactantius.

SECTION II.

Reflections upon the preceding account.

In viewing the progress of Christianity, our first attention is due to the number of converts at Jerusalem, immediately after its Founder's death; because this success was a success at the *time*, and upon the *spot*, when and where the chief part of the history had been transacted.

We are, in the next place, called upon to attend to the early establishment of numerous Christian societies in Judea and Galilee; which countries had been the scene of Christ's miracles and ministry, and where the memory of what had passed, and the knowledge of what was alleged, must have yet been fresh and certain.

We are, thirdly, invited to recollect the success of the apostles and of their com-

panions, at the several places to which they came, both within and without Judea; because it was the credit given to original witnesses, appealing for the truth of their accounts to what themselves had seen and heard. The effect also of their preaching strongly confirms the truth of what our history positively and circumstantially relates, that they were able to exhibit to their hearers supernatural attestations of their mission.

We are, lastly, to consider the *subsequent* growth and spread of the religion, of which we receive successive intimations, and satisfactory, through general and occasional, accounts, until its full and final establishment.

In all these several stages, the history is without a parallel: for it must be observed, that we have not now been tracing the progress, and describing the prevalency, of an opinion, founded upon philosophical or critical arguments, upon mere deductions of reason, or the construction of ancient writings (of which kind are the several theories which have, at different times,

gained possession of the public mind in various departments of science and literature; and of one or other of which kind are the tenets also which divide the various sects of Christianity); but that we speak of a system, the very basis and postulatum of which was a supernatural character ascribed to a particular person; of a doctrine, the truth thereof depended entirely upon the truth of a matter of fact then recent. "To establish a new religion, even amongst a few people, or in one single nation, is a thing in itself exceedingly difficult. To reform some corruptions which may have spread in a religion, or to make new regulations in it, is not perhaps so hard, when the main and principal part of that religion is preserved entire and unshaken; and yet this very often cannot be accomplished without an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, and may be attempted a thousand times without success. But to introduce a new faith, a new way of thinking and acting, and to persuade many nations to quit the religion in which their ancestors have lived and died, which had been delivered down to them from

time immemorial, to make them forsake and despise the deities which they had been accustomed to reverence and worship; this is a work of still greater difficulty*. The resistance of education, worldly policy, and superstition, is almost invincible."

If men, in these days, be Christians in consequence of their education, in submission to authority, or in compliance with fashion, let us recollect that the very contrary of this, at the beginning, was the case. The first race of Christians, as well as millions who succeeded them, became such in formal opposition to all these motives, to the whole power and strength of this influence. Every argument, therefore, and every instance, which sets forth the prejudice of education, and the almost irresistible effects of that prejudice (and no persons are more fond of expatiating upon this subject than deistical writers), in fact confirms the evidence of Christianity.

But, in order to judge of the argument

* Jortin's Dis. on the Christ. Rel. p. 107. ed. iv.

which is drawn from the early propagation of Christianity, I know no fairer way of proceeding, than to compare what we have seen of the subject, with the success of Christian missions in modern ages. In the East-India mission, supported by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, we hear sometimes of thirty, sometimes of forty, being baptized in the course of a year, and these principally children. Of converts properly so called, that is, of adults voluntarily embracing Christianity, the number is extremely small. "Notwithstanding the labour of missionaries for upwards of two hundred years, and the establishments of different Christian nations who support them, there are not twelve thousand Indian Christians, and those almost entirely outcasts*."

I lament, as much as any man, the little progress which Christianity has made in these countries, and the inconsiderable ef-

* Sketches relating to the history, learning, and manners of the Hindoos, p. 48.; quoted by Dr. Roberson, Hist. Dis. concerning ancient India, p. 236.

fect that has followed the labours of its missionaries: but I see in it a strong proof of the Divine origin of the religion. What had the apostles to assist them in propagating Christianity which the missionaries have not? If piety and zeal had been sufficient, I doubt not but that our missionaries possess these qualities in a high degree: for, nothing except piety and zeal could engage them in the undertaking. If sanctity of life and manners was the allurement, the conduct of these men is unblamable. If the advantage of education and learning be looked to, there is not one of the modern missionaries, who is not, in this respect, superior to all the apostles: and that not only absolutely, but what is of more importance, *relatively*, in comparison, that is, with those amongst whom they exercise their office. If the intrinsic excellency of the religion, the perfection of its morality, the purity of its precepts, the eloquence or tenderness or sublimity of various parts of its writings, were the recommendations by which it made its way, these remain the same. If the character and circumstances, under which the preachers were introduced

to the countries in which they taught, be accounted of importance, this advantage is all on the side of the modern missionaries. They come from a country and a people to which the Indian world look up with sentiments of deference. The apostles came forth amongst the Gentiles under no other name than that of Jews, which was precisely the character they despised and derided. If it be disgraceful in India to become a Christian, it could not be much less so to be enrolled amongst those, "quos per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat." If the religion which they had to encounter be considered, the difference, I apprehend, will not be great. The theology of both was nearly the same: "what is supposed to be performed by the power of Jupiter, of Neptune, of Æolus, of Mars, of Venus, according to the mythology of the West, is ascribed, in the East, to the agency of Agrio the god of fire, Varoon the god of oceans, Vayoo the god of wind, Cama the god of love*." The sacred rites of the Western

* Baghvat Geeta, p. 94. quoted by Dr. Robertson, Ind. Dis. p. 306.

Polytheism were gay, festive, and licentious; the rites of the public religion in the East partake of the same character, with a more avowed indecency. "In every function performed in the pagodas, as well as in every public procession, it is the office of these women (*i. e.* of women prepared by the Brahmins for the purpose), to dance before the idol, and to sing hymns in his praise; and it is difficult to say whether they trespass most against decency by the gestures they exhibit, or by the verses which they recite. The walls of the pagodas were covered with paintings in a style no less indelicate*†."

On both sides of the comparison, the popular religion had a strong establishment. In ancient Greece and Rome, it was strictly incorporated with the state. The magistrate was the priest. The highest officers of go-

* Others of the deities of the East are of an austere and gloomy character, to be propitiated by victims, sometimes by human sacrifices, and by voluntary torments of the most excruciating kind.

† Voyage de Gentil. vol. i. p. 244—260. Preface to Code of Gentoo Laws, p. 57. quoted by Dr. Roberston, p. 320.

vernment bore the most distinguished part in the celebration of the public rites. In India, a powerful and numerous cast possess exclusively the administration of the established worship; and are, of consequence, devoted to its service, and attached to its interest. In both, the prevailing mythology was destitute of any proper evidence: or rather, in both, the origin of the tradition is run up into ages long anterior to the existence of credible history, or of written language. The Indian chronology computes æras by millions of years, and the life of man by thousands*; and in these, or prior to these, is placed the history of their divinities. In both, the established superstition held the same place in the public opinion; that is to say, in both it was credited by the bulk of the people†, but by the learned and

* "The Suffec Jogue, or age of purity, is said to have lasted three million two hundred thousand years; and they hold that the life of man was extended in that age to one hundred thousand years; but there is a difference amongst the Indian writers, of six millions of years in the computation of this æra." Ib.

† "How absurd soever the articles of faith may be, which superstition has adopted, or how unhallowed the rites which

philosophical part of the community, either derided, or regarded by them as only fit to be upholden for the sake of its political uses*.

it prescribes, the former are received, in every age and country, with unhesitating assent, by the great body of the people, and the latter observed with scrupulous exactness. In our reasonings concerning opinions and practices which differ widely from our own, we are extremely apt to err. Having been instructed ourselves in the principles of a religion worthy in every respect of that Divine wisdom by which they were dictated, we frequently express wonder at the credulity of nations, in embracing systems of belief which appear to us so directly repugnant to right reason; and sometimes suspect, that tenets so wild and extravagant do not really gain credit with them. But experience may satisfy us, that neither our wonder nor suspicions are well founded. No article of the public religion was called in question by those people of ancient Europe with whose history we are best acquainted; and no practice, which it enjoined, appeared improper to them. On the other hand, every opinion that tended to diminish the reverence of men for the gods of their country, or to alienate them from their worship, excited, among the Greeks and Romans, that indignant zeal which is natural to every people attached to their religion by a firm persuasion of its truth." Ind. Dis. p. 321.

* That the learned Brahmins of the East are rational Theists, and secretly reject the established theory, and contemn the rites that were founded upon them, or rather consider them as contrivances to be supported for their political uses, see Dr. Robertson's Ind. Dis. p. 324—334.

Or if it should be allowed, that the ancient heathens believed in their religion less generally than the present Indians do, I am far from thinking that this circumstance would afford any facility to the work of the apostles, above that of the modern missionaries. To me it appears, and I think it material to be remarked, that a disbelief of the established religion of their country has no tendency to dispose men for the reception of another: but that, on the contrary, it generates a settled contempt of all religious pretensions whatever. General infidelity is the hardest soil which the propagators of a new religion can have to work upon. Could a Methodist or Moravian promise himself a better chance of success, with a French *esprit fort*, who had been accustomed to laugh at the popery of his country, than with a believing Mahometan or Hindoo? Or are our modern unbelievers in Christianity, for that reason, in danger of becoming Mahometans or Hindoos? It does not appear that the Jews, who had a body of historical evidence to offer for their religion, and who at that time undoubtedly entertained

and held forth the expectation of a future state, derived any great advantage, as to the extension of their system, from the discredit into which the popular religion had fallen with many of their heathen neighbours.

We have particularly directed our observations to the state and progress of Christianity amongst the inhabitants of *India:* but the history of the Christian mission in other countries, where the efficacy of the mission is left solely to the conviction wrought by the preaching of strangers, presents the same idea, as the Indian mission does, of the feebleness and inadequacy of human means. About twenty-five years ago, was published in England, a translation from the Dutch of a History of Greenland, and a relation of the mission for above thirty years carried on in that country by the Unitas Fratrum, or Moravians. Every part of that relation confirms the opinion we have stated. Nothing could surpass, or hardly equal, the zeal and patience of the missionaries. Yet their historian, in the conclusion of his narrative, could find place for no reflections

more encouraging than the following:—"A person that had known the heathen, that had seen the little benefit from the great pains hitherto taken with them, and considered that one after another had abandoned all hopes of the conversion of those infidels (and some thought they would never be converted, till they saw miracles wrought as in the apostles' days, and this the Greenlanders expected and demanded of their instructors); one that considered this, I say, would not so much wonder at the past unfruitfulness of these young beginners, as at their steadfast perseverance in the midst of nothing but distress, difficulties, and impediments, internally and externally; and that they never desponded of the conversion of those poor creatures amidst all seeming impossibilities*."

From the widely disproportionate effects which attend the preaching of modern missionaries of Christianity, compared with what followed the ministry of Christ and his apostles under circumstances either

* History of Greenland, vol. ii. p. 376.

alike, or not so unlike as to account for the difference, a conclusion is fairly drawn, in support of what our histories deliver concerning them, *viz.* that they possessed means of conviction, which we have not; that they had proofs to appeal to, which we want.

SECTION III.

Of the Religion of Mahomet.

THE only event in the history of the human species, which admits of comparison with the propagation of Christianity, is the success of Mahometanism. The Mahometan institution was rapid in its progress, was recent in its history, and was founded upon a supernatural or prophetic character assumed by its author. In these articles, the resemblance with Christianity is confessed. But there are points of difference, which separate, we apprehend, the two cases entirely.

I. Mahomet did not found his pretensions upon miracles, properly so called; that is, upon proofs of supernatural agency, capable of being known and attested by others. Christians are warranted in this assertion by

the evidence of the Koran, in which Mahomet not only does not affect the power of working miracles, but expressly disclaims it. The following passages of that book furnish direct proofs of the truth of what we allege:—"The infidels say, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his lord, we will not believe; thou art a preacher only*." Again; "Nothing hindered us from sending *thee* with miracles, except that the former nations have charged them with imposture†." And lastly; "They say, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his lord, we will not believe: Answer; Signs are in the power of God alone, and I am no more than a public preacher. Is it not sufficient for them, that we have sent down unto them the book of the Koran to be read unto them‡?" Beside these acknowledgements, I have observed *thirteen* distinct places, in which Mahomet puts the objection (unless a sign, &c.) into the mouth of the unbeliever, in not one of which does he allege a miracle in reply. His answer is, "that

* Sale's Koran, c. xiii. p. 201. ed. quarto.
† C. xvii. p. 232. ‡ C. xxix. p. 328.

God giveth the power of working miracles, when and to whom he pleaseth* ;" " that if he should work miracles, they would not believe† ;" " that they had before rejected Moses, and Jesus, and the Prophets, who wrought miracles‡ ;" " that the Koran itself was a miracle§."

The only place in the Koran in which it can be pretended that a sensible miracle is referred to (for I do not allow the secret visitations of Gabriel, the night-journey of Mahomet to heaven, or the presence in battle of invisible hosts of angels, to deserve the name of *sensible* miracles), is the beginning of the fifty-fourth chapter. The words are these :—" The hour of judgement approacheth, *and the moon hath been split in sunder* : but if the unbelievers see a sign, they turn aside, saying, This is a powerful charm." The Mahometan expositors disagree in their interpretation of this passage ; some explaining it to be a mention of the splitting of the moon, as one of the future signs

* Sale's Koran, c. v. x. xiii. twice.
† C. vi.
‡ C. iii. xxi. xxviii.
§ C. xvi

of the approach of the day of judgement; others referring it to a miraculous appearance which had then taken place*. It seems to me not improbable, that Mahomet might have taken advantage of some extraordinary halo, or other unusual appearance of the moon, which had happened about this time; and which supplied a foundation both for this passage, and for the story which in after-times had been raised out of it.

After this more than silence, after these authentic *confessions* of the Koran, we are not to be moved with miraculous stories related of Mahomet by Abulfeda, who wrote his life about six hundred years after his death; or which are found in the legend of Al-Jannabi, who came two hundred years later†. On the contrary, from compar-

* Vide Sale, in loc.

† It does not, I think, appear, that these historians had any written accounts to appeal to, more ancient than the Sonnah; which was a collection of traditions made by order of the Caliphs two hundred years after Mahomet's death. Mahomet died A. D. 632; Al-Bochari, one of the six doctors who compiled the Sonnah, was born A. D. 809; died 869. Prideaux's Life of Mahomet, p. 192. ed. 7th.

ing what Mahomet himself wrote and said, with what was afterwards reported of him by his followers, the plain and fair conclusion is, that when the religion was established by conquest, then, and not till then, came out the stories of his miracles.

Now this difference alone constitutes, in my opinion, a bar to all reasoning from one case to the other. The success of a religion founded upon a miraculous history, shows the credit which was given to the history; and this credit, under the circumstances in which it was given, *i. e.* by persons capable of knowing the truth, and interested to inquire after it, is evidence of the reality of the history, and, by consequence, of the truth of the religion. Where a miraculous history is not alleged, no part of this argument can be applied. We admit, that multitudes acknowledged the pretensions of Mahomet: but, these pretensions being destitute of miraculous evidence, we know that the grounds upon which they were acknowledged, could not be secure grounds of persuasion to his followers, nor their example

any authority to us. Admit the whole of Mahomet's authentic history, so far as it was of a nature capable of being known or witnessed by others, to be true (which is certainly to admit all that the reception of the religion can be brought to prove), and Mahomet might still be an impostor, or enthusiast, or a union of both. Admit to be true almost any part of Christ's history, of that, I mean, which was public, and within the cognisance of his followers, and he must have come from God. Where matter of fact is not in question, where miracles are not alleged, I do not see that the progress of a religion is a better argument of its truth, than the prevalency of any system of opinions in natural religion, morality, or physics, is a proof of the truth of those opinions. And we know that this sort of argument is inadmissible in any branch of philosophy whatever.

But it will be said, If one religion could make its way without miracles, why might not another? To which I reply, first, that this is not the question; the proper question is not, whether a religious institution could

be set up without miracles, but whether a religion, or a change of religion, founding itself in miracles, could succeed without any reality to rest upon? I apprehend these two cases to be very different; and I apprehend Mahomet's not taking this course, to be one proof, amongst others, that the thing is difficult, if not impossible, to be accomplished; certainly it was not from an unconsciousness of the value and importance of miraculous evidence: for it is very observable, that in the same volume, and sometimes in the same chapters, in which Mahomet so repeatedly disclaims the power of working miracles himself, he is incessantly referring to the miracles of preceding prophets. One would imagine, to hear some men talk, or to read some books, that the setting up of a religion by dint of miraculous pretences was a thing of every day's experience; whereas, I believe that, except the Jewish and Christian religion, there is no tolerably well authenticated account of any such thing having been accomplished.

II. The establishment of Mahomet's religion was effected by causes which in no

degree appertained to the origin of Christianity.

During the first twelve years of his mission, Mahomet had recourse only to persuasion. This is allowed. And there is sufficient reason from the effect to believe that, if he had confined himself to this mode of propagating his religion, we of the preset day should never have heard either of him or it. "Three years were silently employed in the conversion of *fourteen* proselytes. For ten years, the religion advanced with a slow and painful progress, within the walls of Mecca. The number of proselytes in the seventh year of his mission may be estimated by the absence of *eighty-three* men and eighteen women, who retired to Æthiopia*." Yet this progress, such as it was, appears to have been aided by some very important advantages which Mahomet found in his situation, in his mode of conducting his design, and in his doctrine.

1. Mahomet was the grandson of the most powerful and honourable family in Mecca: and although the early death of his

* Gibbon's Hist. vol. ix. p. 244, et seq.; ed. Dub.

father had not left him a patrimony suitable to his birth, he had, long before the commencement of his mission, repaired this deficiency by an opulent marriage. A person considerable by his wealth, of high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, taking upon himself the character of a religious teacher, would not fail of attracting attention and followers.

2. Mahomet conducted his design, in the outset especially, with great art and prudence. He conducted it as a politician would conduct a plot. His first application was to his own family. This gained him his wife's uncle, a considerable person in Mecca, together with his cousin Ali, afterwards the celebrated Caliph, then a youth of great expectation, and even already distinguished by his attachment, impetuosity, and courage*. He next expressed himself

* Of which Mr. Gibbon has preserved the following specimen:—"When Mahomet called out in an assembly of his family, Who among you will be my companion, and my vizir? Ali, then only in the fourteenth year of his age, suddenly replied, O prophet! I am the man;—whosoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O prophet! I will be thy vizir over them." Vol. ix. p. 245.

to Abu Becr, a man amongst the first of the Koreish in wealth and influence. The interest and example of Abu Becr drew in five other principal persons in Mecca, whose solicitations prevailed upon five more of the same rank. This was the work of three years; during which time, every thing was transacted in secret. Upon the strength of these allies, and under the powerful protection of his family, who, however some of them might disapprove his enterprise, or deride his pretensions, would not suffer the orphan of their house, the relict of their favourite brother, to be insulted, Mahomet now commenced his public preaching. And the advance which he made during the nine or ten remaining years of his peaceable ministry, was by no means greater than what, with these advantages, and with the additional and singular circumstance of there being no *established* religion at Mecca at that time to contend with, might reasonably have been expected. How soon his primitive adherents were let into the secret of his views of empire, or in what stage of his undertaking these views first opened themselves

to his own mind, it is not now easy to determine. The event however was, that these, his first proselytes, all ultimately attained to riches and honours, to the command of armies, and the government of kingdoms*.

3. The Arabs deduced their descent from Abraham through the line of Ishmaël. The inhabitants of Mecca, in common probably with the other Arabian tribes, acknowledged, as, I think, may clearly be collected from the Koran, one supreme Deity, but had associated with him many objects of idolatrous worship. The great doctrine, with which Mahomet set out, was the strict and exclusive unity of God. Abraham, he told them, their illustrious ancestor; Ishmaël, the father of their nation; Moses, the lawgiver of the Jews; and Jesus, the author of Christianity; had all asserted the same thing; that their followers had universally corrupted the truth, and that *he* was now commissioned to restore it to the world Was it to be wondered at, that a doctrine so specious, and authorised by names, some or

* Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 244.

other of which were holden in the highest veneration by every description of his hearers, should, in the hands of a popular missionary, prevail to the extent in which Mahomet succeeded by his pacific ministry?

4. Of the institution which Mahomet joined with this fundamental doctrine, and of the Koran in which that institution is delivered, we discover, I think, two purposes that pervade the whole, *viz.* to make converts, and to make his converts soldiers The following particulars, amongst others, may be considered as pretty evident indications of these designs:

1. When Mahomet began to preach, his address to the Jews, the Christians, and to the Pagan Arabs, was, that the religion which he taught, was no other than what had been originally their own.—"We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down unto us, and that which hath been sent down unto Abraham, and Ishmaël, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that which was delivered unto Moses and Jesus, and that which was delivered unto the pro-

phets from their Lord: we make no distinction between any of them*." "He hath ordained you the religion which he commanded Noah, and which we have revealed unto thee, O Mohammed, and which we commanded Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus, saying, Observe this religion, and be not divided therein †." "He hath chosen you, and hath not imposed on you any difficulty in the religion which he hath given you, the religion of your father Abraham ‡."

2. The author of the Koran never ceases from describing the future anguish of unbelievers, their despair, regret, penitence, and torment. It is the point which he labours above all others. And these descriptions are conceived in terms which will appear in no small degree impressive, even to the modern reader of an English translation. Doubtless they would operate with much greater force upon the minds of those to whom they were immediately directed.

* Sale's Koran, c. ii. p. 17.

† Ib. c. xlii. p. 393.

‡ Ib. c xxii. p. 281.

The terror which they seem well calculated to inspire, would be to many tempers a powerful application.

3. On the other hand; his voluptuous paradise; his robes of silk, his palaces of marble, his rivers and shades, his groves and couches, his wines, his dainties; and, above all, his seventy-two virgins assigned to each of the faithful, of resplendent beauty and eternal youth; intoxicated the imaginations, and seized the passions, of his Eastern followers.

4. But Mahomet's highest heaven was reserved for those who fought his battles, or expended their fortunes in his cause.—"Those believers who sit still at home, not having any hurt, and those who employ their fortunes and their persons for the religion of God, shall not be held equal. God hath preferred those who employ their fortunes and their persons in that cause, to a degree above those who sit at home. God had indeed promised every one Paradise; but God had preferred those who *fight for the faith* before those who sit still, by add-

ing unto them a great reward; by degrees of honour conferred upon them from him, and by granting them forgiveness and mercy*." Again; "Do ye reckon the giving drink to the pilgrims, and the visiting of the holy temple, to be actions as meritorious as those performed by him who believeth in God and the last day, and *fighteth for the religion of God?* They shall not be held equal with God.—They who have believed and fled their country, and employed their substance and their persons in the defence of God's true religion, shall be in the highest degree of honour with God; and these are they who shall be happy. The Lord sendeth them good tidings of mercy from him, and good will, and of gardens wherein they shall enjoy lasting pleasures. They shall continue therein for ever; for with God is a great reward †." And, once more; "Verily God hath purchased of the true believers their souls and their substance, promising them the enjoyment of Paradise, on condition that they *fight for the cause of God:* whether they slay or

* Sale's Koran, c. iv. p. 73. † Ib. c. ix. p. 151.

be slain, the promise for the same is assuredly due by the Law and the Gospel and the Koran*.†."

5. His doctrine of predestination was applicable, and was applied by him, to the same purpose of fortifying and of exalting the courage of his adherents.—"If any thing of the matter had happened unto us, we had not been slain here. Answer; If ye had been in your houses, verily they would have gone forth to fight, whose slaughter was decreed, to the places where they died‡."

6. In warm regions, the appetite of the sexes is ardent, the passion for inebriating liquors moderate. In compliance with this

* Sales's Koran, c. ix. p. 164.

† "The sword," saith Mahomet, "is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months' fasting or prayer. Whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven at the day of judgement; his wounds shall be resplendent as vermillion, and odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim." Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 256.

‡ Sale's Koran, c. iii. p. 54.

distinction, although Mahomet laid a restraint upon the drinking of wine, in the use of women he allowed an almost unbounded indulgence. Four wives, with the liberty of changing them at pleasure*, together with the persons of all his captives†, was an irresistible bribe to an Arabian warrior. "God is minded," says he, speaking of this very subject, "to make his religion light unto you; for man was created weak." How different this from the unaccommodating purity of the Gospel! How would Mahomet have succeeded with the Christian lesson in his mouth,—"Whosoever looketh after a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?" It must be added, that Mahomet did not venture upon the prohibition of wine, till the fourth year of the Hegira, or the seventeenth of his mission‡, when his military successes had completely established his authority. The same observation holds of the fast of the Ramadan §,

* Sale's Koran, c. iv. p. 63.

† Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 225.

‡ Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 126.

§ Ib. p. 112.

and of the most laborious part of his institution, the pilgrimage to Mecca*.

What has hitherto been collected from the records of the Mussulman history, relates to the twelve or thirteen years of Mahomet's peaceable preaching; which part alone of his life and enterprise admits of the smallest comparison with the origin of Christianity. A new scene is now unfolded. The city of Medina, distant about ten days' journey from Mecca, was at that time distracted by the hereditary contentions of two hostile tribes. These feuds were exasperated by the mutual persecutions of the Jews and Christians, and of the different Christian sects by which the city was inhabited †. The religion of Mahomet presented, in some measure, a point of union or compromise to these divided opinions. It embraced the principles which were com-

* This latter, however, already prevailed amongst the Arabs, and had grown out of their excessive veneration for the Caaba. Mahomet's law, in this respect, was rather a compliance than an innovation ‡.

† Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 100.

‡ Sale's Prelim. Disc. p. 122.

mon to them all. Each party saw in it an honourable acknowledgement of the fundamental truth of their own system. To the Pagan Arab, somewhat imbued with the sentiments and knowledge of his Jewish or Christian fellow-citizen, it offered no offensive, or very improbable theology. This recommendation procured to Mahometanism a more favourable reception at Medina, than its author had been able, by twelve years' painful endeavours, to obtain for it at Mecca. Yet, after all, the progress of the religion was inconsiderable. His missionary could only collect a congregation of forty persons*. It was not a religious, but a political association, which ultimately introduced Mahomet into Medina. Harassed, as it should seem, and disgusted by the long continuance of factions and disputes, the inhabitants of that city saw in the admission of the prophet's authority a rest from the miseries which they had suffered, and a suppression of the violence and fury which they had learned to condemn. After an embassy, therefore, com-

* Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 85.

posed of believers and unbelievers*, and of persons of both tribes, with whom a treaty was concluded of strict alliance and support, Mahomet made his public entry, and was received as the sovereign of Medina.

From this time, or soon after this time, the impostor changed his language and his conduct. Having now a town at his command, where to arm his party, and to head them with security, he enters upon new counsels. He now pretends that a divine commission is given him to attack the infidels, to destroy idolatry, and to set up the true faith by the sword †. An early victory over a very superior force, achieved by conduct and bravery, established the renown of his arms, and of his personal character ‡. Every year after this was marked by battles or assassinations. The nature and activity of Mahomet's future exertions may be estimated from the computation, that, in the nine following years of his life, he commanded his army in person in eight

* Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 85.

† Ib. p. 88.

‡ Victory of Bedr, ib. p. 106.

general engagements*, and undertook, by himself or his lieutenants, fifty military enterprises.

From this time we have nothing left to account for, but that Mahomet should collect an army, that his army should conquer, and that his religion should proceed together with his conquests. The ordinary experience of human affairs leaves us little to wonder at, in any of these effects: and they were likewise each assisted by peculiar facilities. From all sides, the roving Arabs crowded round the standard of religion and plunder, of freedom and victory, of arms and rapine. Beside the highly painted joys of a carnal paradise, Mahomet rewarded his followers in this world with a liberal division of the spoils, and with the persons of their female captives†. The condition of Arabia, occupied by small independent tribes, exposed it to the impression, and yielded to the progress, of a firm and resolute army. After the reduction of his native peninsula, the weakness also of the

* Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 255.

† Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 255.

Roman provinces on the north and the west, as well as the distracted state of the Persian empire on the east, facilitated the successful invasion of neighbouring countries. That Mahomet's conquests should carry his religion along with them, will excite little surprise, when we know the conditions which he proposed to the vanquished. Death or conversion was the only choice offered to idolaters. "Strike off their heads! strike off all the ends of their fingers*! kill the idolaters, wheresoever ye shall find them†!" To the Jews and Christians was left the somewhat milder alternative, of subjection and tribute, if they persisted in their own religion, or of an equal participation in the rights and liberties, the honours and privileges, of the faithful, if they embraced the religion of their conquerors. "Ye Christian dogs, you know your option; the Koran, the tribute, or the sword‡." The corrupted state of Christianity in the seventh century, and the contentions of its sects, unhappily so fell in with men's care of their safety, or their for-

* Sale's Koran, c. viii. p. 140. † Ib. c. ix. p. 149.

‡ Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 337.

tunes, as to induce many to forsake its profession. Add to all which, that Mahomet's victories not only operated by the natural effect of conquest, but that they were constantly represented, both to his friends and enemies, as divine declarations in his favour. Success was evidence. Prosperity carried with it, not only influence, but proof. "Ye have already," says he, after the battle of Bedr, "had a miracle shown you, in two armies which attacked each other; one army fought for God's true religion, but the other were infidels*." Again; "*Ye* slew not those who were slain at Bedr, but God slew them.—If ye desire a decision of the matter between us, now hath a decision come unto you †."

Many more passages might be collected out of the Koran to the same effect. But they are unnecessary. The success of Mahometanism during this, and indeed every future period of its history, bears so little resemblance to the early propagation of Christianity, that no inference whatever

* Sale's Koran, c. iii. p. 36.

† Ib. c. viii. p. 141.

can justly be drawn from it to the prejudice of the Christian argument. For, what are we comparing? A Galilean peasant accompanied by a few fishermen, with a conqueror at the head of his army. We compare Jesus without force, without power, without support, without one external circumstance of attraction or influence, prevailing against the prejudices, the learning, the hierarchy, of his country; against the ancient religious opinions, the pompous religious rites, the philosophy, the wisdom, the authority, of the Roman empire, in the most polished and enlightened period of its existence; with Mahomet making his way amongst Arabs; collecting followers in the midst of conquests and triumphs, in the darkest ages and countries of the world, and when success in arms not only operated by that command of men's wills and persons which attends prosperous undertakings, but was considered as a sure testimony of divine approbation. That multitudes, persuaded by this argument, should join the train of a victorious chief; that still greater multitudes should, without any argument, bow down before irresistible

power; is a conduct in which we cannot see much to surprise us; in which we can see nothing that resembles the causes by which the establishment of Christianity was effected.

The success, therefore, of Mahometanism, stands not in the way of this important conclusion; that the propagation of Christianity, in the manner and under the circumstances in which it was propagated, is an *unique* in the history of the species. A Jewish peasant overthrew the religion of the world.

I have, nevertheless, placed the prevalency of the religion amongst the auxiliary arguments of its truth; because, whether it had prevailed or not, or whether its prevalency can or cannot be accounted for, the direct argument remains still. It is still true that a great number of men upon the spot, personally connected with the history and with the author of the religion, were induced by what they heard, and saw, and knew, not only to change their former opinions, but to give up their time, and sacri-

fice their ease, to traverse seas and kingdoms without rest and without weariness, to commit themselves to extreme dangers, to undertake incessant toils, to undergo grievous sufferings, and all this, solely in consequence, and in support, of their belief of facts, which, if true, establish the truth of the religion, which, if false, they must have known to be so.

PART III.

A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

The discrepancies between the several Gospels.

I KNOW not a more rash or unphilosophical conduct of the understanding, than to reject the substance of a story, by reason of some diversity in the circumstances with which it is related. The usual character of human testimony is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. This is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches. When accounts of a transaction come from the mouths of different witnesses, it is seldom that it is not possible to pick out

apparent or real inconsistencies between them. These inconsistencies are studiously displayed by an adverse pleader, but oftentimes with little impression upon the minds of the judges. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud. When written histories touch upon the same scenes of action, the comparison almost always affords ground for a like reflection. Numerous, and sometimes important, variations present themselves; not seldom also, absolute and final contradictions; yet neither one nor the other are deemed sufficient to shake the credibility of the main fact. The embassy of the Jews to deprecate the execution of Claudian's order to place his statue in their temple, Philo places in harvest, Josephus in seed-time; both contemporary writers. No reader is led by this inconsistency to doubt, whether such an embassy was sent, or whether such an order was given. Our own history supplies examples of the same kind. In the account of the Marquis of Argyle's death, in the reign of Charles the Second, we have a very remarkable contradiction. Lord Claren-

don relates that he was condemned to be hanged, which was performed the same day; on the contrary, Burnet, Woodrow, Heath, Echard, concur in stating that he was beheaded; and that he was condemned upon the Saturday, and executed upon the Monday*. Was any reader of English history ever sceptic enough to raise from hence a question, whether the Marquis of Argyle was executed, or not? Yet this ought to be left in uncertainty, according to the principles upon which the Christian history has sometimes been attacked. Dr. Middleton contended, that the different hours of the day assigned to the crucifixion of Christ, by John and by the other evangelists, did not admit of the reconcilement which learned men had proposed: and then concludes the discussion with this hard remark: "We must be forced, with several of the critics, to leave the difficulty just as we found it, chargeable with all the consequences of manifest inconsistency†." But what are these con-

* See Biog. Britann.

† Middleton's Reflections answered by Benson, Hist. Christ. vol. iii. p. 50.

sequences? By no means the discrediting of the history as to the principal fact, by a repugnancy (even supposing that repugnancy not to be resolvable into different modes of computation) in the time of the day in which it is said to have taken place.

A great deal of the discrepancy, observable in the Gospels, arises from *omission;* from a fact or a passage of Christ's life being noticed by one writer, which is unnoticed by another. Now, omission is at all times a very uncertain ground of objection. We perceive it, not only in the comparison of different writers, but even in the same writer, when compared with himself. There are a great many particulars, and some of them of importance, mentioned by Josephus in his Antiquities, which, as we should have supposed, ought to have been put down by him in their place in the Jewish Wars*. Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius, have, all three, written of the reign of Tiberius. Each has

* Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 735, et seq.

mentioned many things omitted by the rest*, yet no objection is from thence taken to the respective credit of their histories. We have in our own times, if there were not something indecorous in the comparison, the life of an eminent person, written by three of his friends, in which there is very great variety in the incidents selected by them; some apparent, and perhaps some real contradictions; yet without any impeachment of the substantial truth of their accounts, of the authenticity of the books, of the competent information or general fidelity of the writers.

But these discrepancies will be still more numerous, when men do not write histories but *memoirs;* which is perhaps the true name and proper description of our Gospels: that is, when they do not undertake, or ever meant to deliver, in order of time, a regular and complete account of *all* the things of importance, which the person, who is the subject of their history, did or said; but only, out of many similar ones, to give such

* Lardner, ib. p. 743.

passages, or such actions and discourses, as offered themselves more immediately to their attention, came in the way of their inquiries, occurred to their recollection, or were suggested by their *particular design* at the time of writing.

This particular design may appear sometimes, but not always, nor often. Thus I think that the particular design which Saint Matthew had in view whilst he was writing the history of the resurrection, was to attest the faithful performance of Christ's promise to his disciples to go before them into Galilee; because he alone, except Mark, who seems to have taken it from him, has recorded this promise, and he alone has confined his narrative to that single appearance to the disciples which fulfilled it. It was the preconcerted, the great and most public manifestation of our Lord's person. It was the thing which dwelt upon Saint Matthew's mind, and he adapted his narrative to it. But, that there is nothing in Saint Matthew's language, which negatives other appearances, or which imports that this his appearance to his dis-

ciples in Galilee, in pursuance of his promise, was his first or only appearance, is made pretty evident by Saint Mark's Gospel, which uses the same terms concerning the appearance in Galilee as Saint Matthew uses, yet itself records two other appearances prior to this: "Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee, then shall ye see him as he said unto you," (xvi. 7.). We might be apt to infer from these words, that this was the *first* time they were to see him: at least, we might infer it, with as much reason as we draw the inference from the same words in Matthew: yet the historian himself did not perceive that he was leading his readers to any such conclusion; for, in the twelfth and two following verses of this chapter, he informs us of two appearances, which, by comparing the order of events, are shown to have been prior to the appearance in Galilee. "He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country: and they went and told it unto the residue, neither believed they them: afterwards he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at

meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief, because they believed not them that had seen him after he was risen."

Probably the same observation, concerning the *particular design* which guided the historian, may be of use in comparing many other passages of the Gospels.

CHAPTER II.

Erroneous opinions imputed to the apostles.

A SPECIES of candour which is shown towards every other book, is sometimes refused to the Scriptures; and that is, the placing of a distinction between judgement and testimony. We do not usually question the credit of a writer, by reason of an opinion he may have delivered upon subjects unconnected with his evidence: and even upon subjects connected with his account, or mixed with it in the same discourse or writing, we naturally separate facts from opinions, testimony from observation, narrative from argument.

To apply this equitable consideration to the Christian records, much controversy and much objection has been raised concerning the quotations of the Old Testa-

ment found in the New; some of which quotations, it is said, are applied in a sense, and to events, apparently different from that which they bear, and from those to which they belong in the original. It is probable to my apprehension, that many of those quotations were intended by the writers of the New Testament as nothing more than *accommodations*. They quoted passages of their Scripture, which suited, and fell in with, the occasion before them, without always undertaking to assert, that the occasion was in the view of the author of the words. Such accommodations of passages from old authors, from books especially which are in every one's hands, are common with writers of all countries; but in none, perhaps, were more to be expected, than in the writings of the Jews, whose literature was almost entirely confined to their Scriptures. Those prophecies which are alleged with more solemnity, and which are accompanied with a precise declaration, that they originally respected the event then related, are, I think, truly alleged. But were it otherwise; is the judgement of the writers of the New Testament,

in interpreting passages of the Old, or sometimes, perhaps, in receiving established interpretations, so connected either with their veracity, or with their means of information concerning what was passing in their own times, as that a critical mistake, even were it clearly made out, should overthrow their historical credit?—Does it diminish it? Has it any thing to do with it?

Another error imputed to the first Christians, was the expected approach of the day of judgement? I would introduce this objection by a remark upon what appears to me a somewhat similar example. Our Saviour, speaking to Peter of John, said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee*?" These words, we find, had been so misconstrued, as that a report from thence "went abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die." Suppose that this had come down to us amongst the prevailing opinions of the early Christians, and that the particular circumstance, from which the mistake sprang, had

* John, xxi. 22.

been lost (which, humanly speaking, was most likely to have been the case), some, at this day, would have been ready to regard and quote the error, as an impeachment of the whole Christian system. Yet with how little justice such a conclusion would have been drawn, or rather such a presumption taken up, the information which we happen to possess enables us now to perceive. To those who think that the Scriptures lead us to believe, that the early Christians, and even the apostles, expected the approach of the day of judgement in their own times, the same reflection will occur, as that which we have made with respect to the more partial, perhaps, and temporary, but still no less ancient, error concerning the duration of Saint John's life. It was an error, it may be likewise said, which would effectually hinder those who entertained it from acting the part of impostors.

The difficulty which attends the subject of the present chapter, is contained in this question; If we once admit the fallibility of the apostolic judgement, where are we

to stop, or in what can we rely upon it? To which question, as arguing with unbelievers, and as arguing for the substantial truth of the Christian history, and for that alone, it is competent to the advocate of Christianity to reply, Give me the apostle's testimony, and I do not stand in need of their judgement; give me the facts, and I have complete security for every conclusion I want.

But, although I think that it is competent to the Christian apologist to return this answer; I do not think that it is the only answer which the objection is capable of receiving. The two following cautions, founded, I apprehend, in the most reasonable distinctions, will exclude all uncertainty upon this head which can be attended with danger.

First, to separate what was the object of the apostolic mission, and declared by them to be so, from what was extraneous to it, or only incidentally connected with it. Of points clearly extraneous to the religion, nothing need be said. Of points incident-

ally connected with it, something may be added. Demoniacal possession is one of these points: concerning the reality of which, as this place will not admit the examination, or even the production of the argument on either side of the question, it would be arrogance in me to deliver any judgement. And it is unnecessary. For what I am concerned to observe is, that even they who think that it was a general, but erroneous, opinion of those times; and that the writers of the New Testament, in common with other Jewish writers of that age, fell into the manner of speaking and of thinking upon the subject, which then universally prevailed, need not be alarmed by the concession, as though they had any thing to fear from it, for the truth of Christianity. The doctrine was not what Christ brought into the world. It appears in the Christian records, incidentally and accidentally, as being the subsisting opinion of the age and country in which his ministry was exercised. It was no part of the object of *his* revelation, to regulate men's opinions concerning the action of spiritual substances upon animal bodies. At any rate it is

unconnected with testimony. If a dumb person was by a word restored to the use of his speech, it signifies little to what cause the dumbness was ascribed; and the like of every other cure wrought upon those who are said to have been possessed. The malady was real, the cure was real, whether the popular explication of the cause was well founded, or not. The matter of fact, the change, so far as it was an object of sense, or of testimony, was in either case the same.

Secondly, that, in reading the apostolic writings, we distinguish between their doctrines and their arguments. Their doctrines came to them by revelation properly so called; yet in propounding these doctrines in their writings or discourses, they were wont to illustrate, support, and enforce them, by such analogies, arguments, and considerations as their own thoughts suggested. Thus the call of the Gentiles, that is, the admission of the Gentiles to the Christian profession without a previous subjection to the law of Moses, was imparted to the apostles by revelation, and was

attested by the miracles which attended the Christian ministry among them. The apostles' own assurance of the matter rested upon this foundation. Nevertheless, Saint Paul, when treating of the subject, offers a great variety of topics in its proof and vindication. The doctrine itself must be received: but it is not necessary, in order to defend Christianity, to defend the propriety of every comparison, or the validity of every argument, which the apostle has brought into the discussion. The same observation applies to some other instances; and is, in my opinion, very well founded; "When divine writers argue upon any point, we are always bound to believe the conclusions that their reasonings end in, as parts of divine revelation: but we are not bound to be able to make out, or even to assent to, all the premises made use of by them, in their whole extent, unless it appear plainly, that they affirm the premises as expressly as they do the conclusions proved by them*."

* Burnet's Expos. art. 6.

CHAPTER III.

The connexion of Christianity with the Jewish history.

UNDOUBTEDLY our Saviour assumes the divine origin of the Mosaic institution: and, independently of his authority, I conceive it to be very difficult to assign any other cause for the commencement or existence of that institution; especially for the singular circumstance of the Jews' adhering to the unity, when every other people slid into polytheism; for their being men in religion, children in every thing else; behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, superior to the most improved in their sentiments and doctrines relating to the Deity*.

* "In the doctrine, for example, of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness, of God; in their opinions concerning Providence, and the creation, preservation, and government, of the world." Campbell on Mir. p. 207. To which we may add, in the acts of their religion not being

Undoubtedly, also, our Saviour recognises the prophetic character of many of their ancient writers. So far, therefore, we are bound as Christians to go. But to make Christianity answerable with its life, for the circumstantial truth of each separate passage of the Old Testament, the genuineness of every book, the information, fidelity, and judgement, of every writer in it, is to bring, I will not say great, but unnecessary difficulties, into the whole system. These books were universally read and received by the Jews of our Saviour's time. He and his apostles, in common with all other Jews, referred to them, alluded to

accompanied either with cruelties or impurities: in the religion itself being free from a species of superstition which prevailed universally in the popular religions of the ancient world, and which is to be found perhaps in all religions that have their origin in human artifice and credulity, *viz.* fanciful connexions between certain appearances and actions, and the destiny of nations or individuals. Upon these conceits rested the whole train of auguries and auspices, which formed so much even of the serious part of the religions of Greece and Rome, and of the charms and incantations which were practised in those countries by the common people. From every thing of this sort the religion of the Jews, and of the Jews alone, was free. Vide Priestley's Lectures on the Truth of the Jewish and Christian Revelation; 1794.

them, used them. Yet, except where he expressly ascribes a divine authority to particular predictions, I do not know that we can strictly draw any conclusion from the books being so used and applied, beside the proof, which it unquestionably is, of their notoriety and reception at that time. In this view, our Scriptures afford a valuable testimony to those of the Jews. But the nature of this testimony ought to be understood. It is surely very different from, what it is sometimes represented to be, a specific ratification of each particular fact and opinion; and not only of each particular fact, but of the motives assigned for every action, together with the judgement of praise or dispraise bestowed upon them. Saint James, in his Epistle*, says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." Notwithstanding this text, the reality of Job's history, and even the existence of such a person, has been always deemed a fair subject of inquiry and discussion amongst Christian divines. Saint James's authority is considered as good evi-

* Chap. v. 11.

dence of the existence of the book of Job at that time, and of its reception by the Jews; and of nothing more. Saint Paul, in his Second Epistle to Timothy*, has this similitude: "Now, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth." These names are not found in the Old Testament. And it is uncertain, whether Saint Paul took them from some apocryphal writing then extant, or from tradition. But no one ever imagined, that Saint Paul is here asserting the authority of the writing, if it was a written account which he quoted, or making himself answerable for the authenticity of the tradition; much less, that he so involves himself with either of these questions as that the credit of his own history and mission should depend upon the fact, whether Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, or not. For what reason a more rigorous interpretation should be put upon other references, it is difficult to know. I do not mean, that other passages of the Jewish history stand upon no better evidence than

* Chap. iii. 8.

the history of Job, or of Jannes and Jambres, (I think much otherwise); but I mean, that a reference in the New Testament, to a passage in the Old, does not so fix its authority, as to exclude all inquiry into its credibility, or into the separate reasons upon which that credibility is founded; and that it is an unwarrantable, as well as unsafe rule to lay down concerning the Jewish history, what was never laid down concerning any other, that either every particular of it must be true, or the whole false.

I have thought it necessary to state this point explicitly, because a fashion, revived by Voltaire, and pursued by the disciples of his school, seems to have much prevailed of late, of attacking Christianity through the sides of Judaism. Some objections of this class are founded in misconstruction, some in exaggeration; but all proceed upon a supposition, which has not been made out by argument, *viz.* that the attestation, which the Author and first teachers of Christianity gave to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, extends to every

point and portion of the Jewish history; and so extends as to make Christianity responsible in its own credibility, for the circumstantial truth (I had almost said for the critical exactness) of every narrative contained in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER IV.

Rejection of Christianity.

We acknowledge that the Christian religion, although it converted great numbers, did not produce an universal, or even a general conviction in the minds of men, of the age and countries in which it appeared. And this want of a more complete and extensive success, is called the *rejection* of the Christian history and miracles: and has been thought by some to form a strong objection to the reality of the facts which the history contains.

The matter of the objection divides itself into two parts; as it relates to the Jews, and as it relates to Heathen nations: because the minds of these two descriptions of men may have been, with respect to Christianity, under the influence of very different causes. The case of the Jews, in-

asmuch as our Saviour's ministry was originally addressed to them, offers itself first to our consideration.

Now, upon the subject of the truth of the Christian religion; with *us*, there is but one question, *viz.* whether the miracles were actually wrought? From acknowledging the miracles, we pass instantaneously to the acknowledgement of the whole. No doubt lies between the premises and the conclusion. If we believe the works or any one of them, we believe in Jesus. And this order of reasoning is become so universal and familiar, that we do not readily apprehend how it could ever have been otherwise. Yet it appears to me perfectly certain, that the state of thought, in the mind of a Jew of our Saviour's age, was totally different from this. After allowing the reality of the miracle, he had a great deal to do to persuade himself that Jesus was the Messiah. This is clearly intimated by various passages of the Gospel history. It appears, that, in the apprehension of the writers of the New Testament, the miracles did not irresistibly carry, even those who

saw them, to the conclusion intended to be drawn from them; or so compel assent, as to leave no room for suspense, for the exercise of candour, or the effects of prejudice. And to this point, at least, the evangelists may be allowed to be good witnesses; because it is a point, in which exaggeration or disguise would have been the other way. Their accounts, if they could be suspected of falsehood, would rather have magnified, than diminished, the effects of the miracles.

John, vii. 21—31. "Jesus answered, and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel.—If a man on the Sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement. Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing to him: do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? *Howbeit we know this*

man, whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is. Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him, for I am from him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. *And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than those which this man hath done?"*

This passage is very observable. It exhibits the reasoning of different sorts of persons upon the occasion of a miracle, which persons of all sorts are represented to have acknowledged as real. One sort of men thought, that there was something very extraordinary in all this; but that still Jesus could not be the Christ, because there was a circumstance in his appearance which militated with an opinion concerning Christ, in which they had been brought up, and of the truth of which, it is probable, they had never entertained a particle of doubt, *viz.*

that " when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is." Another sort were inclined to believe him to be the Messiah. But even these did not argue as we should; did not consider the miracle as of itself decisive of the question; as what, if once allowed, excluded all further debate upon the subject; but founded their opinion upon a kind of comparative reasoning, " When Christ cometh, will he do *more* miracles than those which this man hath done?"

Another passage in the same evangelist, and observable for the same purpose, is that in which he relates the resurrection of Lazarus: " Jesus," he tells us (xi. 43, 44.), " when he had thus spoken, cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth: and he that was dead, came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." One might have suspected, that at least all those who stood by the sepulchre, when Lazarus was raised, would have believed in Jesus. Yet the evangelist does not so represent it:—" Then many of the Jews

which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him; but *some of them* went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." We cannot suppose that the evangelist meant by this account, to leave his readers to imagine, that any of the spectators doubted about the truth of the miracle. Far from it. Unquestionably, he states the miracle to have been fully allowed: yet the persons who allowed it, were, according to his representation, capable of retaining hostile sentiments towards Jesus. "Believing in Jesus" was not only to believe that he wrought miracles, but that he was the Messiah. With us, there is no difference between these two things: with them, there was the greatest; and the difference is apparent in this transaction. If Saint John has represented the conduct of the Jews upon this occasion truly (and why he should not I cannot tell, for it rather makes against him than for him), it shows clearly the principles upon which their judgement proceeded. Whether he has related the matter truly or not, the relation itself discovers the writer's own

opinion of those principles; and that alone possesses considerable authority. In the next chapter, we have a reflection of the evangelist, entirely suited to this state of the case: "but though he had done so many miracles before them, yet believed they not on him*." The evangelist does not mean to impute the defect of their belief to any doubt about the miracles; but to their not perceiving, what all now sufficiently perceive, and what they would have perceived, had not their understandings been governed by strong prejudices, the infallible attestation which the works of Jesus bore to the truth of his pretensions.

The ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel contains a very circumstantial account of the cure of a blind man; a miracle submitted to all the scrutiny and examination which a sceptic could propose. If a modern unbeliever had drawn up the interrogatories, they could hardly have been more critical or searching. The account contains also a very curious conference between the Jewish rulers and the patient, in which

* Chap. xii. 37.

the point for our present notice is their resistance of the force of the miracle, and of the conclusion to which it led, after they had failed in discrediting its evidence. "We know that God spake unto Moses: but as for this fellow, we know not whence he is." That was the answer which set their minds at rest. And by the help of much prejudice, and great unwillingness to yield, it might do so. In the mind of the poor man restored to sight, which was under no such bias, and felt no such reluctance, the miracle had its natural operation. "Herein," says he, "is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know, that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." We do not find, that the Jewish rulers had any other reply to make to this defence, than that which authority is sometimes apt to make to argument, "Dost thou teach us?"

If it shall be inquired, how a turn of thought, so different from what prevails at present, should obtain currency with the ancient Jews; the answer is found in two opinions which are proved to have subsisted in that age and country. The one was, their expectation of a Messiah of a kind totally contrary to what the appearance of Jesus bespoke him to be; the other, their persuasion of the agency of demons in the production of supernatural effects. These opinions are not *supposed* by us for the purpose of argument, but are evidently recognised in the Jewish writings, as well as in ours. And it ought moreover to be considered, that in these opinions the Jews of that age had been from their infancy brought up; that they were opinions, the grounds of which they had probably few of them inquired into, and of the truth of which they entertained no doubt. And I think that these two opinions conjointly afford an explanation of their conduct. The first put them upon seeking out some excuse to themselves for not receiving Jesus in the character in which he claimed to be received; and th

second supplied them with just such an excuse as they wanted. Let Jesus work what miracles he would, still the answer was in readiness, "that he wrought them by the assistance of Beelzebub." And to this answer no reply could be made, but that which our Saviour did make, by showing that the tendency of his mission was so adverse to the views with which this being was, by the objectors themselves, supposed to act, that it could not reasonably be supposed that he would assist in carrying it on. The power displayed in the miracles did not alone refute the Jewish solution, because the interposition of invisible agents being once admitted, it is impossible to ascertain the limits by which their efficiency is circumscribed. We of this day may be disposed, possibly to think such opinions too absurd to have been ever seriously entertained. I am not bound to contend for the credibility of the opinions. They were at least as reasonable as the belief in witchcraft. They were opinions in which the Jews of that age had from their infancy been instructed; and those who cannot see enough in the force of this reason, to

account for their conduct towards our Saviour, do not sufficiently consider how such opinions may sometimes become very general in a country, and with what pertinacity, when once become so, they are, for that reason alone, adhered to. In the suspense which these notions, and the prejudices resulting from them, might occasion, the candid and docile and humble-minded would probably decide in Christ's favour; the proud and obstinate, together with the giddy and the thoughtless, almost universally against him.

This state of opinion discovers to us also the reason of what some choose to wonder at, why the Jews should reject miracles when they saw them, yet rely so much upon the tradition of them in their own history. It does not appear, that it had ever entered into the minds of those who lived in the time of Moses and the prophets, to ascribe *their* miracles to the supernatural agency of evil beings. The solution was not then invented. The authority of Moses and the prophets being established, and become the founda-

tion of the national polity and religion, it was not probable that the later Jews, brought up in a reverence for that religion, and the subjects of that polity, should apply to their history a reasoning which tended to overthrow the foundation of both.

II. The infidelity of the Gentile world, and that more especially of men of rank and learning in it, is resolvable into a principle which, in my judgement, will account for the inefficacy of any argument or any evidence whatever, *viz.* contempt prior to examination. The state of religion amongst the Greeks and Romans, had a natural tendency to induce this disposition. Dionysius Halicarnassensis remarks, that there were six hundred different kinds of religions or sacred rites exercised at Rome*. The superior classes of the community treated them all as fables. Can we wonder then, that Christianity was included in the number, without inquiry into its separate merits, or the

* Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 371.

particular grounds of its pretensions? It might be either true or false for any thing they knew about it. The religion had nothing in its character which immediately engaged their notice. It mixed with no politics. It produced no fine writers. It contained no curious speculations. When it did reach their knowledge, I doubt not but that it appeared to them a very strange system,—sounphilosophical,—dealing so little in argument and discussion, in such arguments however and discussions as they were accustomed to entertain. What is said of Jesus Christ, of his nature, office, and ministry, would be, in the highest degree, alien from the conceptions of their theology. The Redeemer and the destined Judge of the human race, a poor young man, executed at Jerusalem with two thieves upon a cross! Still more would the language in which the Christian doctrine was delivered, be dissonant and barbarous to their ears. What knew they of grace, of redemption, of justification, of the blood of Christ shed for the sins of men, of reconcilement, of mediation? Christianity was made up of

points they had never thought of; of terms which they had never heard.

It was presented also to the imagination of the learned Heathen under additional disadvantage, by reason of its real, and still more of its nominal, connexion with Judaism. It shared in the obloquy and ridicule, with which that people and their religion were treated by the Greeks and Romans. They regarded Jehovah himself only as the idol of the Jewish nation, and what was related of him, as of a piece with what was told of the tutelar deities of other countries: nay, the Jews were in a particular manner ridiculed for being a credulous race; so that whatever reports of a miraculous nature came out of that country, were looked upon by the Heathen world as false and frivolous. When they heard of Christianity, they heard of it as a quarrel amongst this people, about some articles of their own superstition. Despising, therefore, as they did, the whole system, it was not probable that they would enter, with any degree of seriousness or attention, into the detail of its disputes, or the merits of either side.

How little they knew, and with what carelessness they judged, of these matters, appears, I think, pretty plainly from an example of no less weight than that of Tacitus, who, in a grave and professed discourse upon the history of the Jews, states, that they worshipped the effigy of an ass*. The passage is a proof, how prone the learned men of those times were, and upon how little evidence, to heap together stories which might increase the contempt and odium in which that people was holden. The same foolish charge is also confidently repeated by Plutarch†.

It is observable, that all these considerations are of a nature to operate with the greatest force upon the highest ranks; upon men of education, and that order of the public from which *writers* are principally taken: I may add also, upon the philosophical as well as the libertine character; upon the Antonines or Julian, not less than upon Nero or Domitian; and more particularly, upon that large and polished

* Tacit. Hist. lib. v. c. 2. † Sympos. lib. iv. quæst. 5.

class of men, who acquiesced in the general persuasion, that all they had to do was to practise the duties of morality, and to worship the deity *more patrio;* a habit of thinking, liberal as it may appear, which shuts the door against every argument for a new religion. The considerations above-mentioned, would acquire also strength from the prejudice which men of rank and learning universally entertain against any thing that *originates* with the vulgar and illiterate; which prejudice is known to be as obstinate as any prejudice whatever.

Yet Christianity was still making its way: and, amidst so many impediments to its progress, so much difficulty in procuring audience and attention, its actual success is more to be wondered at, than that it should not have universally conquered scorn and indifference, fixed the levity of a voluptuous age, or, through a cloud of adverse prejudications, opened for itself a passage to the hearts and understandings of the scholars of the age.

And the cause which is here assigned for

the rejection of Christianity by men of rank and learning among the Heathens, namely, a strong antecedent contempt, accounts also for their *silence* concerning it. If they had rejected it upon examination, they would have written about it; they would have given their reasons. Whereas what men repudiate upon the strength of some prefixed persuasion, or from a settled contempt of the subject, of the persons who propose it, or of the manner in which it is proposed, they do not naturally write books about, or notice much in what they write upon other subjects.

The letters of the Younger Pliny furnish an example of this silence, and let us, in some measure, into the cause of it. From his celebrated correspondence with Trajan, we know that the Christian religion prevailed in a very considerable degree in the province over which he presided; that it had excited his attention; that he had inquired into the matter, just so much as a Roman magistrate might be expected to inquire, *viz.* whether the religion contained any opinions dangerous to government;

but that of its doctrines, its evidences, or its books, he had not taken the trouble to inform himself with any degree of care or correctness. But although Pliny had viewed Christianity in a nearer position than most of his learned countrymen saw it in; yet he had regarded the whole with such negligence and disdain (farther than as it seemed to concern his administration), that, in more than two hundred and forty letters of his which have come down to us, the subject is never once again mentioned. If, out of this number, the two letters between him and Trajan had been lost; with what confidence would the obscurity of the Christian religion have been argued from Pliny's silence about it, and with how little truth!

The name and character which Tacitus has given to Christianity, "exitiabilis superstitio" (a pernicious superstition), and by which two words he disposes of the whole question of the merits or demerits of the religion, afford a strong proof how little he knew, or concerned himself to know, about the matter. I apprehend that

I shall not be contradicted, when I take upon me to assert, that no unbeliever of the present age would apply this epithet to the Christianity of the New Testament, or not allow that it was entirely unmerited. Read the instructions given, by a great teacher of the religion, to those very Roman converts, of whom Tacitus speaks; and given also a very few years before the time of which he is speaking; and which are not, let it be observed, a collection of fine sayings brought together from different parts of a large work, but stand in one entire passage of a public letter, without the intermixture of a single thought which is frivolous or exceptionable:—"Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another: not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord: rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer: distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord: therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for, in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have

praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all, their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying*."

Read this, and then think of "exitiabilis superstitio!!"—Or if we be not allowed, in contending with Heathen authorities, to produce our books against theirs, we may at least be permitted to confront theirs with one another. Of this "pernicious superstition," what could *Pliny* find to blame, when he was led, by his office, to institute something like an examination into the conduct and principles of the sect? He discovered nothing, but that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves a hymn to Christ as a God, and to

* Romans, xii. 9—xiii. 13.

bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but, not to be guilty of theft, robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it.

Upon the words of Tacitus we may build the following observations:

First; That we are well warranted in calling the view under which the learned men of that age beheld Christianity, an obscure and distant view. Had Tacitus known more of Christianity, of its precepts, duties, constitution, or design, however he had discredited the story, he would have respected the principle. He would have described the religion differently, though he had rejected it. It has been very satisfactorily shown, that the "superstition" of the Christians consisted in worshipping a person unknown to the Roman calendar; and that the "perniciousness" with which they were reproached, was nothing else but their opposition to the established polytheism; and this view

of the matter was just such a one as might be expected to occur to a mind, which held the sect in too much contempt to concern itself about the grounds and reasons of their conduct.

Secondly; We may from hence remark, how little reliance can be placed upon the most acute judgements, in subjects which they are pleased to despise: and which, of course, they from the first consider as unworthy to be inquired into. Had not Christianity survived to tell its own story, it must have gone down to posterity as a "pernicious superstition;" and that upon the credit of Tacitus's account, much, I doubt not, strengthened by the name of the writer, and the reputation of his sagacity.

Thirdly; That this contempt prior to examination, is an intellectual vice, from which the greatest faculties of mind are not free. I know not, indeed, whether men of the greatest faculties of mind are not the most subject to it. Such men feel themselves seated upon an eminence. Looking

down from their height upon the follies of mankind, they behold contending tenets wasting their idle strength upon one another, with the common disdain of the absurdity of them all. This habit of thought, however comfortable to the mind which entertains it, or however natural to great parts, is extremely dangerous; and more apt, than almost any other disposition, to produce hasty and contemptuous, and, by consequence, erroneous judgements, both of persons and opinions.

Fourthly; We need not be surprised at many writers of that age not mentioning Christianity at all; when they who did mention it, appear to have entirely misconceived its nature and character; and, in consequence of this misconception, to have regarded it with negligence and contempt.

To the knowledge of the greatest part of the learned Heathens, the facts of the Christian history could only come by report. The books, probably, they had never looked into. The settled habit of their

minds was, and long had been, an indiscriminate rejection of all reports of the kind. With these sweeping conclusions, truth hath no chance. It depends upon distinction. If they would not inquire, how should they be convinced? It might be founded in truth, though they, who made no search, might not discover it.

" Men of rank and fortune, of wit and abilities, are often found, even in Christian countries, to be surprisingly ignorant of religion, and of every thing that relates to it. Such were many of the heathens. Their thoughts were all fixed upon other things; upon reputation and glory, upon wealth and power, upon luxury and pleasure, upon business or learning. They thought, and they had reason to think, that the religion of their country was fable and forgery, a heap of inconsistent lies; which inclined them to suppose that other religions were no better. Hence it came to pass, that when the apostles preached the Gospel, and wrought miracles in confirmation of a doctrine every way worthy of God, many Gentiles knew little or

nothing of it, and would not take the least pains to inform themselves about it. This appears plainly from ancient history*."

I think it by no means unreasonable to suppose, that the heathen public, especially that part which is made up of men of rank and education, were divided into two classes; those who despised Christianity beforehand, and those who received it. In correspondency with which division of character, the writers of that age would also be of two classes; those who were silent about Christianity, and those who were Christians. "A good man, who attended sufficiently to the Christian affairs, would become a Christian; after which his testimony ceased to be pagan, and became Christian†."

I must also add, that I think it sufficiently proved, that the notion of magic was resorted to by the heathen adversaries of Christianity, in like manner as that of dia-

* Jortin's Disc. on the Christ. Rel. p. 66. ed. 4th.

† Hartley, Obs. p. 119.

bolical agency had before been by the Jews. Justin Martyr alleges this as his reason for arguing from prophecy, rather than from miracles. Origen imputes this evasion to Celsus; Jerome to Porphyry; and Lactantius to the heathen in general. The several passages, which contain these testimonies, will be produced in the next chapter. It being difficult however to ascertain in what degree this notion prevailed, especially amongst the superior ranks of the heathen communities, another, and I think an adequate, cause has been assigned for their infidelity. It is probable that in many cases the two causes would operate together.

CHAPTER V.

That the Christian miracles are not recited, or appealed to, by early Christian writers themselves, so fully or frequently as might have been expected.

I SHALL consider this objection, first, as it applies to the letters of the apostles, preserved in the New Testament; and secondly, as it applies to the remaining writings of other early Christians.

The epistles of the apostles are either hortatory or argumentative. So far as they were occupied in delivering lessons of duty, rules of public order, admonitions against certain prevailing corruptions, against vice, or any particular species of it, or in fortifying and encouraging the constancy of the disciples under the trials to which they were exposed, there appears

to be no place or occasion for more of these references than we actually find.

So far as the epistles are argumentative the nature of the argument which they handle, accounts for the infrequency of these allusions. These epistles were not written to prove the truth of Christianity. The subject under consideration was not that which the miracles decided, the reality of our Lord's mission; but it was that which the miracles did not decide, the nature of his person or power, the design of his advent, its effects, and of those effects the value, kind, and extent. Still I maintain, that miraculous evidence lies at the bottom of the argument. For nothing could be so preposterous as for the disciples of Jesus to dispute amongst themselves, or with others, concerning his office or character, unless they believed that he had shown, by supernatural proofs, that there was something extraordinary in both. Miraculous evidence, therefore, forming not the texture of these arguments, but the ground and substratum, if it be occasionally discerned, if it be inci-

dentally appealed to, it is exactly so much as ought to take place, supposing the history to be true.

As a further answer to the objection, that the apostolic epistles do not contain so frequent, or such direct and circumstantial recitals of miracles as might be expected, I would add, *that the apostolic epistles resemble in this respect the apostolic speeches*, which speeches are given by a writer who distinctly records numerous miracles wrought by these apostles themselves, and by the Founder of the institution in their presence: that it is unwarrantable to contend, that the omission, or infrequency, of such recitals in the speeches of the apostles, negatives the existence of the miracles, when the speeches are given in immediate conjunction with the history of those miracles: and that a conclusion which cannot be inferred from the speeches, without contradicting the whole tenour of the book which contains them, cannot be inferred from letters, which, in this respect, are similar only to the speeches.

To prove the similitude which we allege, it may be remarked, that although in Saint Luke's Gospel the apostle Peter is represented to have been present at many decisive miracles wrought by Christ; and although the second part of the same history ascribes other decisive miracles to Peter himself, particularly the cure of the lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts, iii. 1.), the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts, v. 1.), the cure of Æneas (Acts, ix. 34.), the resurrection of Dorcas (Acts, ix. 40.); yet out of six speeches of Peter, preserved in the Acts, I know but two in which reference is made to the miracles wrought by Christ, and only one in which he refers to miraculous powers possessed by himself. In his speech upon the day of Pentecost, Peter addresses his audience with great solemnity, thus: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know*:" &c. In his speech upon the conversion of Cornelius,

* Acts, ii. 22.

he delivers his testimony to the miracles performed by Christ, in these words: "We are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem*." But in this latter speech, no allusion appears to the miracles wrought by himself, notwithstanding that the miracles above enumerated all preceded the time in which it was delivered. In his speech upon the election of Matthias†, no distinct reference is made to any of the miracles of Christ's history, except his resurrection. The same also may be observed of his speech upon the cure of the lame man at the gate of the temple‡: the same in his speech before the Sanhedrim§; the same in his second apology in the presence of that assembly. Stephen's long speech contains no reference whatever to miracles, though it be expressly related of him, in the book which preserves the speech, and almost immediately before the speech, "that he did great wonders and miracles among the people‖." Again, although miracles be expressly attributed to

* Acts, x. 39. † i. 15. ‡ iii. 12. § iv. 8. ‖ vi. 8.

Saint Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, first generally, as at Iconium (Acts, xiv. 3.), during the whole tour through the Upper Asia (xiv. 27. xv. 12.), at Ephesus (xix. 11, 12.); secondly, in specific instances, as the blindness of Elymas at Paphos*, the cure of the cripple at Lystra†, of the pythoness at Philippi‡, the miraculous liberation from prison in the same city§, the restoration of Eutychus‖, the predictions of his shipwreck¶, the viper at Melita**, the cure of Publius's father††; at all which miracles except the first two, the historian himself was present: notwithstanding, I say, this positive ascription of miracles to Saint Paul, yet in the speeches delivered by him, and given as delivered by him, in the same book in which the miracles are related, and the miraculous powers asserted, the appeals to his own miracles, or indeed to any miracles at all, are rare and incidental. In his speech at Antioch in Pisidia‡‡, there is no allusion but to the resurrection. In his discourse at Miletus§§, none to any miracle;

* Acts, xiii. 11. † xiv. 8. ‡ xvi. 16. § xvi. 26. ‖ xx. 10. ¶ xxvii. 1. ** xxviii. 6. †† xxviii. 8. ‡‡ xiii. 16. §§ xx. 17.

none in his speech before Felix*; none in his speech before Festus†; except to Christ's resurrection, and his own conversion.

Agreeably hereunto, in thirteen letters ascribed to Saint Paul, we have incessant references to Christ's resurrection, frequent references to his own conversion, three indubitable references to the miracles which he wrought‡; four other references to the same, less direct yet highly probable§; but more copious or circumstantial recitals we have not. The consent, therefore, between Saint Paul's speeches and letters, is in this respect sufficiently exact: and the reason in both is the same; namely, that the miraculous history was all along *presupposed*, and that the question, which occupied the speaker's and the writer's thoughts, was this: whether, allowing the history of Jesus to be true, he was, upon the strength of it, to be received as the

* Acts, xxiv. 10. † Ib. xxv. 8.

‡ Gal. iii. 5.; Rom. xv. 18, 19.; 2 Cor. xii. 12.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.; Eph. iii. 7.; Gal. ii. 8.; 1 Thess. i. 5.

promised Messiah; and, if he was, what were the consequences, what was the object and benefit, of his mission?

The general observation which has been made upon the apostolic writings, namely, that the subject of which they treated, did not lead them to any direct recital of the Christian history, belongs also to the writings of the apostolic fathers. The epistle of Barnabas is, in its subject and general composition, much like the epistle to the Hebrews; an allegorical application of divers passages of the Jewish history, of their law and ritual, to those parts of the Christian dispensation in which the author perceived a resemblance. The epistle of Clement was written for the sole purpose of quieting certain dissensions that had arisen amongst the members of the church of Corinth, and of reviving in their minds that temper and spirit of which their predecessors in the Gospel had left them an example. The work of Hermas is a vision: quotes neither the Old Testament nor the New; and merely falls now and then into the language, and the mode of

speech, which the author had read in our Gospels. The epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius had for their principal object the order and discipline of the churches which they addressed. Yet, under all these circumstances of disadvantage, the great points of the Christian history are fully recognised. This hath been shown in its proper place*.

There is, however, another class of writers, to whom the answer above given, *viz.* the unsuitableness of any such appeals or references as the objection demands, to the subjects of which the writings treated, does not apply; and that is, the class of ancient *apologists*, whose declared design it was to defend Christianity, and to give the reasons of their adherence to it. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire how the matter of the objection stands in these.

The most ancient apologist, of whose works we have the smallest knowledge, is Quadratus. Quadratus lived about seventy

* Vol. i. p. 118—123.

years after the ascension, and presented his apology to the emperor Adrian. From a passage of this work, preserved in Eusebius, it appears that the author did directly and formally appeal to the miracles of Christ, and in terms as express and confident as we could desire. The passage (which has been once already stated) is as follows: "The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both they that were healed, and they that were raised from the dead, were seen, not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterwards: not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while after it; insomuch as that some of them have reached to our times*." Nothing can be more rational or satisfactory than this.

Justin Martyr, the next of the Christian apologists whose work is not lost, and who followed Quadratus at the distance of about thirty years, has touched upon passages of Christ's history in so many places, that a

*Euseb. Hist. l. iv. c. 3.

tolerably complete account of Christ's life might be collected out of his works. In the following quotation, he asserts the performance of miracles by Christ, in words as strong and positive as the language possesses: "Christ healed those who from their birth were blind, and deaf, and lame; causing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and having raised the dead, and caused them to live, he, by his works, excited attention, and induced the men of that age to know him. Who, however, seeing these things done, said that it was a magical appearance, and dared to call him a magician, and a deceiver of the people*."

In his first apology†, Justin expressly assigns the reason for his having recourse to the argument from prophecy, rather than alleging the miracles of the Christian history; which reason was, that the persons with whom he contended would ascribe these miracles to magic; "lest any of our

* Just. Dial. p. 258, ed. Thirlby.

† Apolog. prim. p. 48, ib.

opponents should say, What hinders, but that he who is called Christ by us, being a man sprung from men, performed the miracles which we attributed to him, by magical art?" The suggestion of this reason meets, as I apprehend, the very point of the present objection; more especially when we find Justin followed in it, by other writers of that age. Irenæus, who came about forty years after him, notices the same evasion in the adversaries of Christianity, and replies to it by the same argument: "But, if they shall say, that the Lord performed these things by an illusory appearance (φανταστικῶς), leading these objectors to the prophecies, we will show from them, that all things were thus predicted concerning him, and strictly came to pass*." Lactantius, who lived a century lower, delivers the same sentiment, upon the same occasion: "He performed miracles;—we might have supposed him to have been a magician, as ye say, and as the Jews then supposed, if all the prophets had not with one spirit foretold that Christ should perform these very things†."

* Iren. l. ii. c. 57. † Lactant. v. 3.

But to return to the Christian apologists in their order. Tertullian:—"That person whom the Jews had vainly imagined, from the meanness of his appearance, to be a mere man, they afterwards, in consequence of the power he exerted, considered as a magician, when he, with one word, ejected devils out of the bodies of men, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the leprous, strengthened the nerves of those that had the palsy, and, lastly, with one command, restored the dead to life; when he, I say, made the very elements obey him, assuaged the storms, walked upon the seas, demonstrating himself to be the Word of God*."

Next in the catalogue of professed apologists we may place Origen, who, it is well known, published a formal defence of Christianity, in answer to Celsus, a heathen, who had written a discourse against it. I know no expressions, by which a plainer or more positive appeal to the Christian miracles can be made, than the expressions used by Origen; "Undoubtedly we do think him to be the Christ, and the Son of

* Tertull. Apolog. p. 20; ed. Priorii, Par. 1675.

God, because he healed the lame and the blind; and we are the more confirmed in this persuasion, by what is written in the prophecies: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear, and the lame man shall leap as an hart." But that he also raised the dead, and that it is not a fiction of those who wrote the Gospels, is evident from hence, that, if it had been a fiction, there would have been many recorded to be raised up, and such as had been a long time in their graves. But, it not being a fiction, few have been recorded: for instance, the daughter of the ruler of a synagogue, of whom I do not know why he said, She is not dead but sleepeth, expressing something peculiar to her, not common to all dead persons; and the only son of a widow, on whom he had compassion, and raised him to life, after he had bid the bearers of the corpse to stop; and the third, Lazarus, who had been buried four days." This is positively to assert the miracles of Christ, and it is also to comment upon them, and that with a considerable degree of accuracy and candour.

In another passage of the same author we meet with the old solution of magic applied to the miracles of Christ by the adversaries of the religion. "Celsus," saith Origen, "well knowing what great works may be alleged to have been done by Jesus, pretends to grant that the things related of him are true; such as healing diseases, raising the dead, feeding multitudes with a few loaves, of which large fragments were left*." And then Celsus gives, it seems, an answer to these proofs of our Lord's mission, which, as Origen understood it, resolved the phenomena into magic; for, Origen begins his reply, by observing, "You see that Celsus in a manner allows that there is such a thing as magic†."

It appears also from the testimony of Saint Jerome, that Porphyry, the most learned and able of the Heathen writers against Christianity, resorted to the same solution: "Unless," says he, speaking to Vigilantius, "according to the manner of the gentiles and the profane, of *Porphyry*

* Orig. cont. Cels. lib. ii. sect. 48.

† Lardner's Jewish and Heath. Test. vol. ii. p. 294. ed. 4to.

and Eunomius, you pretend that these are the tricks of demons*."

This magic, these demons, this illusory appearance, this comparison with the tricks of jugglers, by which many of that age accounted so easily for the Christian miracles, and which answers the advocates of Christianity often thought it necessary to refute by arguments drawn from other topics, and particularly from prophecy (to which, it seems, these solutions did not apply), we now perceive to be gross subterfuges. That such reasons were ever seriously urged, and seriously received, is only a proof, what a gloss and varnish fashion can give to any opinion.

It appears, therefore, that the miracles of Christ, understood, as we understand them, in their literal and historical sense, were positively and precisely asserted and appealed to by the apologists for Christianity; which answers the allegation of the objection.

* Jerome cont. Vigil.

I am ready, however, to admit, that the ancient Christian advocates did not insist upon the miracles in argument, so frequently as I should have done. It was their lot to contend with notions of magical agency, against which the mere production of the facts was not sufficient for the convincing of their adversaries: I do not know whether they themselves thought it quite decisive of the controversy. But since it is proved, I conceive with certainty, that the sparingness with which they appealed to miracles, was owing neither to their ignorance, nor their doubt of the facts, it is, at any rate, an objection, not to the truth of the history, but to the judgement of its defenders.

CHAPTER VI.

Want of universality in the knowledge and reception of Christianity, and of greater clearness in the evidence.

Of a revelation which really came from God, the proof, it has been said, would in all ages be so public and manifest, that no part of the human species would remain ignorant of it, no understanding could fail of being convinced by it.

The advocates of Christianity do not pretend that the evidence of their religion possesses these qualities. They do not deny that we can conceive it to be within the compass of divine power, to have communicated to the world a higher degree of assurance, and to have given to his communication a stronger and more extensive influence. For any thing we are able to discern, God *could* have so formed men, as to

have perceived the truths of religion intuitively: or to have carried on a communication with the other world, whilst they lived in this; or to have seen the individuals of the species, instead of dying, pass to heaven by a sensible translation. He could have presented a separate miracle to each man's senses. He could have established a standing miracle. He could have caused miracles to be wrought in every different age and country. These, and many more methods, which we may imagine, if we once give loose to our imaginations, are, so far as we can judge, all practicable.

The question, therefore, is not whether Christianity possesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether the not having more evidence be a sufficient reason for rejecting that which we have.

Now there appears to be no fairer method of judging, concerning any dispensation which is alleged to come from God, when a question is made whether such a dispensation could come from God or not,

than by comparing it with other things which are acknowledged to proceed from the same counsel, and to be produced by the same agency. If the dispensation in question labour under no defects but what apparently belong to other dispensations, these seeming defects do not justify us, in setting aside the proofs which are offered of its authenticity, if they be otherwise entitled to credit.

Throughout that order then of nature, of which God is the author, what we find is a system of *beneficence:* we are seldom or ever able to make out a system of *optimism.* I mean, that there are few cases in which, if we permit ourselves to range in possibilities, we cannot suppose something more perfect, and more unobjectionable, than what we see. The rain which descends from heaven, is confessedly amongst the contrivances of the Creator, for the sustentation of the animals and vegetables which subsist upon the surface of the earth. Yet how partially and irregularly is it supplied! How much of it falls upon the sea, where it can be of no use!

how often is it wanted where it would be of the greatest! What tracts of continent are rendered deserts by the scarcity of it! Or, not to speak of extreme cases, how much, sometimes, do inhabited countries suffer by its deficiency or delay!—We could imagine, if to imagine were our business, the matter to be otherwise regulated. We could imagine showers to fall, just where and when they would do good; always seasonable, every where sufficient; so distributed as not to leave a field upon the face of the globe scorched by drought, or even a plant withering for the lack of moisture. Yet, does the difference between the real case and the imagined case, or the seeming inferiority of the one to the other authorize us to say, that the present disposition of the atmosphere is not amongst the productions or the designs of the Deity? Does it check the inference which we draw from the confessed beneficence of the provision? or does it make us cease to admire the contrivance?—The observation, which we have exemplified in the single instance of the rain of heaven, may be repeated concerning most of the

phenomena of nature; and the true conclusion to which it leads is this: that to inquire what the Deity might have done, could have done, or, as we even sometimes presume to speak, ought to have done, or, in hypothetical cases, would have done, and to build any propositions upon such inquiries against evidence of facts, is wholly unwarrantable. It is a mode of reasoning which will not do in natural history, which will not do in natural religion, which cannot therefore be applied with safety to revelation. It may have some foundation, in certain speculative *à priori* ideas of the divine attributes; but it has none in experience, or in analogy. The general character of the works of nature is, on the one hand, goodness both in design and effect; and, on the other hand, a liability to difficulty, and to objections, if such objections be allowed, by reason of seeming incompleteness or uncertainty in attaining their end. Christianity participates of this character. The true similitude between nature and revelation consists in this; that they each bear strong marks of their original; that they each

also bear appearances of irregularity and defect. A system of strict optimism may nevertheless be the real system in both cases. But what I contend is, that the proof is hidden from *us;* that we ought not to expect to perceive *that* in revelation, which we hardly perceive in any thing; that beneficence, of which we *can* judge, ought to satisfy us, that optimism, of which we *cannot* judge, ought not to be sought after. We can judge of beneficence, because it depends upon effects which we experience, and upon the relation between the means which we see acting and the ends which we see produced. We cannot judge of optimism, because it necessarily implies a comparison of that which is tried, with that which is not tried; of consequences which we see, with others which we imagine, and concerning many of which, it is more than probable we know nothing; concerning some, that we have no notion.

If Christianity be compared with the state and progress of natural religion, the argument of the objector will gain nothing

by the comparison. I remember hearing an unbeliever say, that, if God had given a revelation, he would have written it in the skies. Are the truths of natural religion written in the skies, or in a language which every one reads? or is this the case with the most useful arts, or the most necessary sciences of human life? An Otaheitean or an Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity; does he know more of the principles of deism or morality? which, notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue, nor unimportant, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is left to be collected from observations, which every man does not make, which every man, perhaps, is not capable of making. Can it be argued, that God does not exist, because, if he did, he would let us see him, or discover himself to mankind by proofs (such as, we may think, the nature of the subject merited), which no inadvertency could miss, no prejudice withstand?

If Christianity be regarded as a providential instrument for the melioration of mankind, its progress and diffusion re-

sembles that of other causes by which human life is improved. The diversity is not greater, nor the advance more slow, in religion, than we find it to be in learning, liberty, government, laws. The Deity hath not touched the order of nature in vain. The Jewish religion produced great and permanent effects; the Christian religion hath done the same. It hath disposed the world to amendment. It hath put things in a train. It is by no means improbable, that it may become universal: and that the world may continue in that stage so long as that the duration of its reign may bear a vast proportion to the time of its partial influence.

When we argue concerning Christianity, that it must necessarily be true, because it is beneficial, we go, perhaps, too far on one side: and we certainly go too far on the other, when we conclude that it must be false, because it is not so efficacious as we could have supposed. The question of its truth is to be tried upon its proper evidence, without deferring much to this sort of argument, on either side. "The

evidence," as bishop Butler hath rightly observed, "depends upon the judgement we form of human conduct, under given circumstances, of which it may be presumed that we know something; the objection stands upon the supposed conduct of the Deity, under relations with which we are not acquainted."

What would be the real effect of that overpowering evidence which our adversaries require in a revelation, it is difficult to foretell; at least, we must speak of it as of a dispensation of which we have no experience. Some consequences however would, it is probable, attend this economy, which do not seem to befit a revelation that proceeded from God. One is, that irresistible proof would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would call for no exercise of candour, seriousness, humility, inquiry; no submission of passion, interests, and prejudices, to moral evidence and to probable truth; no habits of reflection; none of that previous desire to learn and to obey the will of

God, which forms perhaps the test of the virtuous principle, and which induces men to attend, with care and reverence, to every credible intimation of that will, and to resign present advantages and present pleasures to every reasonable expectation of propitiating his favour. "Men's moral probation may be, whether they will take due care to inform themselves by impartial consideration; and, afterwards, whether they will act as the case requires, upon the evidence which they have. And this we find by experience, is often our probation in our temporal capacity*."

II. These modes of communication would leave no place for the admission of *internal evidence;* which ought, perhaps, to bear a considerable part in the proof of every revelation, because it is a species of evidence, which applies itself to the knowledge, love, and practice, of virtue, and which operates in proportion to the degree of those qualities which it finds in the person whom it addresses. Men of good

* Butler's Analogy, part ii. c. vi

dispositions, amongst Christians, are greatly affected by the impression which the Scriptures themselves make upon their minds. Their conviction is much strengthened by these impressions. And this perhaps was intended to be one effect to be produced by the religion. It is likewise true, to whatever cause we ascribe it (for I am not in this work at liberty to introduce the Christian doctrine of grace or assistance, or the Christian promise, that, "if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God*"), —it is true, I say, that they who sincerely act, or sincerely endeavour to act, *according* to what they believe, that is, according to the just result of the probabilities, or, if you please, the possibilities in natural and revealed religion, which they themselves perceive, and according to a rational estimate of consequences, and, above all, according to the just effect of those principles of gratitude and devotion, which even the view of nature generates in a well-ordered mind, *seldom fail of*

* John, vii. 17.

proceeding farther. This also may have been exactly what was designed.

Whereas, may it not be said that irresistible evidence would confound all characters and all dispositions? would subvert, rather than promote, the true purpose of the divine counsels; which is, not to produce *obedience* by a force little short of mechanical constraint (which obedience would be regularity, not virtue, and would hardly perhaps differ from that which inanimate bodies pay to the laws impressed upon their nature), but to treat moral agents agreeably to what they are; which is done, when light and motives are of such kinds, and are imparted in such measures, that the influence of them depends upon the recipients themselves? "It is not meet to govern rational free agents *in viâ* by sight and sense. It would be no trial or thanks to the most sensual wretch to forbear sinning, if heaven and hell were open to his sight. That spiritual vision and fruition is our state *in patriâ*." (Baxter's Reasons, p. 357.) There may be truth in this thought, though roughly expressed. Few

things are more improbable than that we (the human species) should be the highest order of beings in the universe: that animated nature should ascend from the lowest reptile to us, and all at once stop there. If there be classes above us of rational intelligences, clearer manifestations may belong to them. This may be one of the distinctions. And it may be one, to which we ourselves hereafter shall attain.

III. But may it not also be asked, whether the perfect display of a future state of existence would be compatible with the activity of civil life, and with the success of human affairs? I can easily conceive that this impression may be overdone; that it may so seize and fill the thoughts, as to leave no place for the cares and offices of men's several stations, no anxiety for worldly prosperity, or even for a worldly provision, and, by consequence, no sufficient stimulus to secular industry. Of the first Christians we read, "that all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as

every man had need; and, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*." This was extremely natural, and just what might be expected from miraculous evidence coming with full force upon the senses of mankind: but I much doubt whether, if this state of mind had been universal, or long-continued, the business of the world could have gone on. The necessary arts of social life would have been little cultivated. The plough and the loom would have stood still. Agriculture, manufactures, trade, and navigation, would not, I think, have flourished, if they could have been exercised at all. Men would have addicted themselves to contemplative and ascetic lives, instead of lives of business and of useful industry. We observe that Saint Paul found it necessary, frequently to recall his converts to the ordinary labours and domestic duties of their condition; and to give them in his own example, a lesson of contented application to their worldly employments.

* Acts, ii. 44—46.

By the manner in which the religion is now proposed, a great portion of the human species is enabled, and of these multitudes of every generation are induced, to seek and to effectuate their salvation through the medium of Christianity, without interruption of the prosperity or of the regular course of human affairs.

CHAPTER VII.

The supposed effects of Christianity.

That a religion, which, under every form in which it is taught, holds forth the final reward of virtue and punishment of vice, and proposes those distinctions of virtue and vice, which the wisest and most cultivated part of mankind confess to be just, should not be believed, is very possible; but that, so far as it is believed, it should not produce any good, but rather a bad effect upon public happiness, is a proposition which it requires very strong evidence to render credible. Yet many have been found to contend for this paradox, and very confident appeals have been made to history, and to observation, for the truth of it.

In the conclusions, however, which these writers draw from what they call expe-

rience, two sources, I think, of mistake, may be perceived.

One is, that they look for the influence of religion in the wrong place.

The other, that they charge Christianity with many consequences, for which it is not responsible.

I. The influence of religion is not to be sought for in the councils of princes, in the debates or resolutions of popular assemblies, in the conduct of governments towards their subjects, or of states and sovereigns towards one another; of conquerors at the head of their armies, or of parties intriguing for power at home (topics which alone almost occupy the attention, and fill the pages, of history); but must be perceived, if perceived at all, in the silent course of private and domestic life. Nay more; even *there* its influence may not be very obvious to observation. If it check, in some degree, personal dissoluteness, if it beget a general probity in the transaction of business, if it produce soft and humane

manners in the mass of the community, and occasional exertions of laborious or expensive benevolence in a few individuals, it is all the effect which can offer itself to external notice. The kingdom of heaven is within us. That which is the substance of the religion, its hopes and consolations, its intermixture with the thoughts by day and by night, the devotion of the heart, the control of appetite, the steady direction of the will to the commands of God, is necessarily invisible. Yet upon these depend the virtue and the happiness of millions. This cause renders the representations of history, with respect to religion, defective and fallacious, in a greater degree than they are upon any other subject. Religion operates most upon those of whom history knows the least; upon fathers and mothers in their families, upon men-servants and maid-servants, upon the orderly tradesman, the quiet villager, the manufacturer at his loom, the husbandman in his fields. Amongst such, its influence collectively may be of inestimable value, yet its effects, in the mean time, little upon those who figure upon the stage of the

world. *They* may know nothing of it; they may believe nothing of it; they may be actuated by motives more impetuous than those which religion is able to excite. It cannot, therefore, be thought strange, that this influence should elude the grasp and touch of public history: for, what is public history, but a register of the successes and disappointments, the vices, the follies, and the quarrels, of those who engage in contentions for power?

I will add, that much of this influence may be felt in times of public distress, and little of it in times of public wealth and security. This also increases the uncertainty of any opinions that we draw from historical representations. The influence of Christianity is commensurate with no effects which history states. We do not pretend that it has any such necessary and irresistible power over the affairs of nations, as to surmount the force of other causes.

The Christian religion also acts upon public usages and institutions, by an ope-

ration which is only secondary and indirect. Christianity is not a code of civil law. It can only reach public institutions through private character. Now its influence upon private character may be considerable, yet many public usages and institutions repugnant to its principles may remain. To get rid of these, the reigning part of the community must act, and act together. But it may be long before the persons who compose this body, be sufficiently touched with the Christian character, to join in the suppression of practices, to which they and the public have been reconciled by causes which will reconcile the human mind to any thing, by habit and interest. Nevertheless, the effects of Christianity, even in this view, have been important. It has mitigated the conduct of war, and the treatment of captives. It has softened the administration of despotic, or of nominally despotic governments. It has abolished polygamy. It has restrained the licentiousness of divorces. It has put an end to the exposure of children, and the immolation of slaves. It has suppressed the

combats of gladiators*, and the impurities of religious rites. It has banished, if not unnatural vices, at least the toleration of them. It has greatly meliorated the condition of the laborious part, that is to say, of the mass of every community, by procuring for them a day of weekly rest. In all countries, in which it is professed, it has produced numerous establishments for the relief of sickness and poverty; and, in some, a regular and general provision by law. It has triumphed over the slavery established in the Roman empire: it is contending, and, I trust, will one day prevail, against the worse slavery of the West Indies.

A Christian writer†, so early as in the second century, has testified the resistance which Christianity made to wicked and licentious practices though established by

* Lipsius affirms (Sat. b. i. c. 12.), that the gladiatorial shows sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month; and that not only the men, but even the women of all ranks, were passionately fond of these shows. See bishop Porteus's Sermon XIII.

† Bardesanes, ap. Euseb. Præp. Evang. vi. 10.

law and by public usage :—" Neither in Parthia, do the Christians, though Parthians, use polygamy; nor in Persia, though Persians, do they marry their own daughters; nor among the Bactri, or Galli, do they violate the sanctity of marriage; nor wherever they are, do they suffer themselves to be overcome by ill-constituted laws and manners."

Socrates did not destroy the idolatry of Athens, or produce the slightest revolution in the manners of his country.

But the argument to which I recur, is, that the benefit of religion, being felt chiefly in the obscurity of private stations, necessarily escapes the observation of history. From the first general notification of Christianity to the present day, there have been in every age many millions, whose names were never heard of, made better by it, not only in their conduct, but in their disposition; and happier, not so much in their external circumstances, as in that which is *inter præcordia*, in that which alone deserves the name of happiness,

the tranquillity and consolation of their thoughts. It has been, since its commencement, the author of happiness and virtue to millions and millions of the human race. Who is there that would not wish his son to be a Christian?

Christianity also, in every country in which it is professed, hath obtained a sensible, although not a complete influence, upon the public judgement of morals. And this is very important. For without the occasional correction which public opinion receives, by referring to some fixed standard of morality, no man can foretel into what extravagances it might wander. Assassination might become as honourable as duelling; unnatural crimes be accounted as venial, as fornication is wont to be accounted. In this way it is possible, that many may be kept in order by Christianity, who are not themselves Christians. They may be guided by the rectitude which it communicates to public opinion. Their consciences may suggest their duty truly, and they may ascribe these suggestions to a moral sense, or to the native capacity of

the human intellect, when in fact they are nothing more than the public opinion, reflected from their own minds; and opinion, in a considerable degree, modified by the lessons of Christianity. "Certain it is, and this is a great deal to say, that the generality, even of the meanest and most vulgar and ignorant people, have truer and worthier notions of God, more just and right apprehensions concerning his attributes and perfections, a deeper sense of the difference of good and evil, a greater regard to moral obligations and to the plain and most necessary duties of life, and a more firm and universal expectation of a future state of rewards and punishments, than, in any heathen country, any considerable number of men were found to have had*."

After all, the value of Christianity is not to be appreciated by its *temporal* effects. The object of revelation is to influence human conduct in this life; but what is gained to happiness by that influence, can only be estimated by taking in the whole

* Clarke, Ev. Nat. Rel. p. 208. ed. v.

of human existence. Then, as hath already been observed, there may be also great consequences of Christianity, which do not belong to it as a revelation. The effects upon human salvation, of the mission, of the death, of the present, of the future agency of Christ, may be universal, though the religion be not universally known.

Secondly, I assert that Christianity is charged with many consequences for which it is not responsible. I believe that religious motives have had no more to do in the formation of nine-tenths of the intolerant and persecuting laws, which in different countries have been established upon the subject of religion, than they have had to do in England with the making of the game-laws. These measures, although they have the Christian religion for their subject, are resolvable into a principle which Christianity certainly did not plant (and which Christianity could not universally condemn, because it is not universally wrong), which principle is no other than this, that

they who are in possession of power do what they can to keep it. Christianity is answerable for no part of the mischief which has been brought upon the world by persecution, except that which has arisen from *conscientious* persecutors. Now these perhaps have never been, either numerous, or powerful. Nor is it to Christianity that even *their* mistake can fairly be imputed. They have been misled by an error not properly Christian or religious, but by an error in their moral philosophy. They pursued the particular, without adverting to the general consequence. Believing certain articles of faith, or a certain mode of worship, to be highly conducive, or perhaps essential, to salvation, they thought themselves bound to bring all they could, by every means, into them. And this they thought, without considering what would be the effect of such a conclusion, when adopted amongst mankind as a general rule of conduct. Had there been in the New Testament, what there are in the Koran, precepts authorising coercion in the propagation of the religion, and the use of violence to-

wards unbelievers, the case would have been different. This distinction could not have been taken, nor this defence made.

I apologise for no species nor degree of persecution, but I think that even the fact has been exaggerated. The slave-trade destroys more in a year, than the Inquisition does in a hundred, or perhaps hath done since its foundation.

If it be objected, as I apprehend it will be, that Christianity is chargeable with every mischief, of which it has been the *occasion*, though not the motive; I answer, that, if the malevolent passions be there, the world will never want occasions. The noxious element will always find a conductor. Any point will produce an explosion. Did the applauded intercommunity of the Pagan theology perserve the peace of the Roman world? did it prevent oppressions, proscriptions, massacres, devastations? Was it bigotry that carried Alexander into the East, or brought Cæsar into Gaul? Are the nations of the world, into which Christianity hath not found its way,

or from which it hath been banished, free from contentions? Are their contentions less ruinous and sanguinary? Is it owing to Christianity, or to the want of it, that the finest regions of the East, the countries *inter quatuor maria*, the peninsula of Greece, together with a great part of the Mediterranean coast, are at this day a desert? or that the banks of the Nile, whose constantly renewed fertility is not to be impaired by neglect, or destroyed by the ravages of war, serve only for the scene of a ferocious anarchy, or the supply of unceasing hostilities? Europe itself has known no religious wars for some centuries, yet has hardly ever been without war. Are the calamities, which at this day afflict it, to be imputed to Christianity? Hath Poland fallen by a Christian crusade? Hath the overthrow in France of civil order and security, been effected by the votaries of our religion, or by the foes? Amongst the awful lessons, which the crimes and the miseries of that country afford to mankind, this is one, that, in order to be a persecutor, it is not necessary to be a bigot: that in rage and cruelty, in mischief and

destruction, fanaticism itself can be outdone by infidelity.

Finally, If war, as it is now carried on between nations, produce less misery and ruin than formerly, we are indebted perhaps to Christianity for the change, more than to any other cause. Viewed therefore even in its relation to this subject, it appears to have been of advantage to the world. It hath humanised the conduct of wars; it hath ceased to excite them.

The differences of opinion, that have in all ages prevailed amongst Christians, fall very much within the alternative which has been stated. If we possessed the disposition which Christianity labours, above all other qualities, to inculcate, these differences would do little harm. If that disposition be wanting, other causes, even were these absent, would continually rise up to call forth the malevolent passions into action. Differences of opinion, when accompanied with mutual charity, which Christianity forbids them to violate, are for the most part innocent, and for some pur-

poses useful. They promote inquiry, discussion, and knowledge. They help to keep up an attention to religious subjects, and a concern about them, which might be apt to die away in the calm and silence of universal agreement. I do not know that it is in any degree true, that the influence of religion is the greatest, where there are the fewest dissenters.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Conclusion.

In religion, as in every other subject of human reasoning, much depends upon the *order* in which we dispose our inquiries. A man who takes up a system of divinity with a previous opinion that either every part must be true, or the whole false, approaches the discussion with great disadvantage. No other system, which is founded upon moral evidence, would bear to be treated in the same manner. Nevertheless, in a certain degree, we are all introduced to our religious studies under this prejudication. And it cannot be avoided. The weakness of the human judgement in the early part of youth, yet its extreme susceptibility of impression, renders it necessary to furnish it with some opinions, and with some principles, or other. Or indeed, without much express care, or much endea-

vour for this purpose, the tendency of the mind of man to assimilate itself to the habits of thinking and speaking which prevail around him, produces the same effect. That indifferency and suspense, that waiting and equilibrium of the judgement, which some require in religious matters, and which some would wish to be aimed at in the conduct of education, are impossible to be preserved. They are not given to the condition of human life.

It is a consequence of this institution that the doctrines of religion come to us before the proofs; and come to us with that mixture of explications and inferences from which no public creed is, or can be, free. And the effect which too frequently follows, from Christianity being presented to the understanding in this form, is, that when any articles, which appear as parts of it, contradict the apprehension of the persons to whom it is proposed, men of rash and confident tempers hastily and indiscriminately reject the whole. But is this to do justice, either to themselves, or to the religion? The rational way of treating a subject of

such acknowledged importance is to attend, in the first place, to the general and substantial truth of its principles, and to that alone. When we once feel a foundation; when we once perceive a ground of credibility in its history, we shall proceed with safety to inquire into the interpretation of its records, and into the doctrines which have been deduced from them. Nor will it either endanger our faith, or diminish or alter our motives for obedience, if we should discover that these conclusions are formed with very different degrees of probability, and possess very different degrees of importance.

This conduct of the understanding, dictated by every rule of right reasoning, will uphold personal Christianity, even in those countries in which it is established under forms the most liable to difficulty and objection. It will also have the further effect of guarding us against the prejudices which are wont to arise in our minds to the disadvantage of religion, from observing the numerous controversies which are carried on amongst its professors; and likewise of in-

ducing a spirit of lenity and moderation in our judgement, as well as in our treatment of those who stand, in such controversies, upon sides opposite to ours. What is clear in Christianity, we shall find to be sufficient, and to be infinitely valuable; what is dubious, unnecessary to be decided, or of very subordinate importance; and what is most obscure, will teach us to bear with the opinions which others may have formed upon the same subject. We shall say to those who the most widely dissent from us, what Augustine said to the worst heretics of his age: "Illi in vos sæviant, qui nesciunt, cum quo labore verum inveniatur, et quàm difficilè caveantur errores;—qui nesciunt, cum quantâ difficultate sanetur oculus interioris hominis;—qui nesciunt, quibus suspiriis et gemitibus fiat ut ex quantulâcunque parte possit intelligi Deus*."

A judgement, moreover, which is once pretty well satisfied of the general truth of the religion, will not only thus discriminate in its doctrines, but will possess sufficient

* Aug. contra Ep. Fund. cap. ii. n. 2, 3.

strength to overcome the reluctance of the imagination to admit articles of faith which are attended with difficulty of apprehension, if such articles of faith appear to be truly parts of the revelation. It was to be expected beforehand, that what related to the economy, and to the persons, of the invisible world, which revelation professes to do, and which, if true, it actually does, should contain some points remote from our analogies, and from the comprehension of a mind which hath acquired all its ideas from sense and from experience.

It hath been my care, in the preceding work, to preserve the separation between evidences and doctrines as inviolable as I could; to remove from the primary question all considerations which have been unnecessarily joined with it; and to offer a defence to Christianity, which every Christian might read, without seeing the tenets in which he had been brought up attacked or decried: and it always afforded a satisfaction to my mind to observe that this was practicable; that few or none of our many controversies with one another affect or re-

late to the proofs of our religion; that the rent never descends to the foundation.

The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone. Now of these we have evidence which ought to satisfy us, at least until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by the same. We have some uncontested and incontestable points, to which the history of the human species hath nothing similar to offer. A Jewish peasant changed the religion of the world, and that, without force, without power, without support; without one natural source, or circumstance of attraction, influence, or success. Such a thing hath not happened in any other instance. The companions of this Person, after he himself had been put to death for his attempt, asserted his supernatural character, founded upon his supernatural operations: and, in testimony of the truth of their assertions, *i. e.* in consequence of their own belief of that truth, and in order to communicate the knowledge of it to others, voluntarily entered upon lives of toil and hardship, and,

with a full experience of their danger, committed themselves to the last extremities of persecution. This hath not a parallel. More particularly, a very few days after this Person had been publicly executed, and in the very city in which he was buried, these his companions declared with one voice that his body was restored to life: that they had seen him, handled him, eat with him, conversed with him; and, in pursuance of their persuasion of the truth of what they told, preached his religion, with this strange fact as the foundation of it, in the face of those who had killed him, who were armed with the power of the country, and necessarily and naturally disposed to treat his followers as they had treated himself; and having done this upon the spot where the event took place, carried the intelligence of it abroad, in despite of difficulties and opposition, and where the nature of their errand gave them nothing to expect but derision, insult, and outrage.—This is without example. These three facts, I think, are certain, and would have been nearly so, if the Gospels had

never been written. The Christian story, as to these points, hath never varied. No other hath been set up against it. Every letter, every discourse, every controversy, amongst the followers of the religion; every book written by them, from the age of its commencement to the present time, in every part of the world in which it hath been professed, and with every sect into which it hath been divided (and we have letters and discourses written by contemporaries, by witnesses of the transaction, by persons themselves bearing a share in it, and other writings following that age in regular succession), *concur* in representing these facts in this manner. A religion, which now possesses the greatest part of the civilised world, unquestionably sprang up at Jerusalem at this time. Some account must be given of its origin; some cause assigned for its rise. All the accounts of this origin, all the explications of this cause, whether taken from the writings of the early followers of the religion (in which, and in which perhaps alone, it could be expected that they should be distinctly unfolded), or from

occasional notices in other writings of that or the adjoining age, either expressly allege the facts above stated as the means by which the religion was set up, or advert to its commencement in a manner which agrees with the supposition of these facts being true, and which testifies their operation and effects.

These propositions alone lay a foundation for our faith; for they prove the existence of a transaction, which cannot even in its most *general* parts be accounted for, upon any reasonable supposition, except that of the truth of the mission. But the particulars, the *detail* of the miracles or miraculous pretences (for such there necessarily must have been), upon which this unexampled transaction rested, and *for* which these men acted and suffered as they did act and suffer, it is undoubtedly of great importance to us to know. We *have* this detail from the fountain-head, from the persons themselves; in accounts written by eye-witnesses of the scene, by contemporaries and companions of those who were so; not in one book, but four,

each containing enough for the verification of the religion, all agreeing in the fundamental parts of the history. We have the authenticity of these books, established, by more and stronger proofs than belong to almost any other ancient book whatever, and by proofs which widely distinguish them from any others claiming a similar authority to theirs. If there were any good reason for doubt concerning the names to which these books are ascribed (which there is not, for they were never ascribed to any other, and we have evidence not long after their publication of their bearing the names which they now bear), their antiquity, of which there is no question, their reputation and authority amongst the early disciples of the religion, of which there is as little, form a valid proof that they must, in the main at least, have agreed with what the first teachers of the religion delivered.

When we open these ancient volumes, we discover in them marks of truth, whether we consider each in itself, or collate them with one another. The writers cer-

tainly knew something of what they were writing about, for they manifest an acquaintance with local circumstances, with the history and usages of the times, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, living in that age. In every narrative we perceive simplicity and undesignedness; the air and the language of reality. When we compare the different narratives together, we find them so varying as to repel all suspicion of confederacy; so agreeing under this variety, as to show that the accounts had one real transaction for their common foundation; often attributing different actions and discourses, to the person whose history, or rather memoirs of whose history, they profess to relate, yet actions and discourses so similar, as very much to bespeak the same character; which is a coincidence, that, in such writers as they were, could only be the consequence of their writing from fact, and not from imagination.

These four narratives are confined to the history of the Founder of the religion, and end with his ministry. Since, however, it is

certain that the affair went on, we cannot help being anxious to know *how* it proceeded. This intelligence hath come down to us in a work purporting to be written by a person, himself connected with the business during the first stages of its progress, taking up the story where the former histories had left it, carrying on the narrative, oftentimes with great particularity, and throughout with the appearance of good sense*, information, and candour; stating all along the origin, and the only probable origin, of effects which unquestionably were produced, together with the natural consequences of situations which unquestionably did exist; and *confirmed*, in the substance at least of the account, by the strongest possible accession of testimony which a history can receive, *original letters*, written by the person who is the principal subject of the history, written upon the business to which the history relates, and during the period, or soon after the period,

* See Peter's speech upon curing the cripple (Acts, iii. 18.), the council of the apostles (xv.), Paul's discourse at Athens (xvii. 22.), before Agrippa (xxvi.). I notice these passages, both as fraught with good sense, and as free from the smallest tincture of enthusiasm.

which the history comprises. No man can say that this all together is not a body of strong historical evidence.

When we reflect that some of those from whom the books proceeded, are related to have themselves wrought miracles, to have been the subject of miracles, or of supernatural assistance in propagating the religion, we may perhaps be led to think, that more credit, or a different kind of credit, is due to these accounts, than what can be claimed by merely human testimony. But this is an argument which cannot be addressed to sceptics or unbelievers. A man must be a Christian before he can receive it. The inspiration of the historical Scriptures, the nature, degree, and extent of that inspiration, are questions undoubtedly of serious discussion; but they are questions amongst Christians themselves, and not between them and others. The doctrine itself is by no means necessary to the belief of Christianity, which must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility*.

* See Powell's Discourses, disc. xv. p. 245.

In viewing the detail of miracles recorded in these books we find every supposition negatived, by which they can be resolved into fraud or delusion. They were not secret, nor momentary, nor tentative, nor ambiguous; nor performed under the sanction of authority, with the spectators on their side, or in affirmance of tenets and practices already established. We find also the evidence alleged for them, and which evidence was by great numbers received, different from that upon which other miraculous accounts rest. It was contemporary, it was published upon the spot, it continued; it involved interests and questions, of the greatest magnitude; it contradicted the most fixed persuasions and prejudices of the persons to whom it was addressed; it required from those who accepted it, not a simple, indolent assent, but a change, from thenceforward, of principles and conduct, a submission to consequences the most serious and the most deterring, to loss and danger, to insult, outrage, and persecution. How such a story should be false, or, if false, how under such circumstances it should make its way, I think im-

possible to be explained; yet such the Christian story was, such were the circumstances under which it came forth, and in opposition to such difficulties did it prevail.

An event so connected with the religion, and with the fortunes, of the Jewish people, as one of their race, one born amongst them, establishing his authority and his law throughout a great portion of the civilised world, it was perhaps to be expected, should be noticed in the prophetic writings of that nation; especially when this Person, together with his own mission, caused also to be acknowledged the divine original of their institution, and by those who before had altogether rejected it. Accordingly, we perceive in these writings, various intimations *concurring* in the person and history of Jesus, in a manner, and in a degree, in which passages taken from these books could not be made to concur in any person arbitrarily assumed, or in any person except him who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. Of some of these predictions the

weight depends a good deal upon the concurrence. Others possess great separate strength: one in particular does this in an eminent degree. It is an entire description, manifestly directed to one character and to one scene of things: it is extant in a writing, or collection of writings, declaredly prophetic; and it applies to Christ's character, and to the circumstances of his life and death, with considerable precision, and in a way which no diversity of interpretation hath, in my opinion, been able to confound. That the advent of Christ, and the consequences of it, should not have been more distinctly revealed in the Jewish sacred books, is, I think, in some measure accounted for by the consideration, that for the Jews to have foreseen the fall of their institution, and that it was to merge at length into a more perfect and comprehensive dispensation, would have cooled too much, and relaxed, their zeal for it, and their adherence to it, upon which zeal and adherence the preservation in the world of any remains, for many ages, of religious truth might in a great measure depend.

Of what a revelation discloses to mankind, one, and only one, question can properly be asked, Was it of importance to mankind to know, or to be better assured of? In this question, when we turn our thoughts to the great Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and of a future judgement, no doubt can possibly be entertained. He who gives me riches or honours, does nothing; he who even gives me health, does little, in comparison with that which lays before me just grounds for expecting a restoration to life, and a day of account and retribution: which thing Christianity hath done for millions.

Other articles of the Christian faith, although of infinite importance when placed beside any other topic of human inquiry, are only the adjuncts and circumstances of this. They are, however, such as appear worthy of the original to which we ascribe them. The morality of the religion, whether taken from the precepts or the example of its Founder, or from the lessons of its primitive teachers, derived, as it should seem, from what had been inculcated by

their Master, is, in all its parts, wise and pure; neither adapted to vulgar prejudices, nor flattering popular notions, nor excusing established practices, but calculated, in the matter of its instruction, truly to promote human happiness, and in the form in which it was conveyed, to produce impression and effect; a morality, which, let it have proceeded from any person whatever, would have been satisfactory evidence of his good sense and integrity, of the soundness of his understanding and the probity of his designs; a morality, in every view of it, much more perfect than could have been expected from the natural circumstances and character of the person who delivered it; a morality, in a word, which is, and hath been, most beneficial to mankind.

Upon the greatest, therefore, of all possible occasions, and for a purpose of inestimable value, it pleased the Deity to vouchsafe a miraculous attestation. Having done this for the institution, when this alone could fix its authority, or give to it a beginning, he committed its future pro-

gress to the natural means of human communication, and to the influence of those causes by which human conduct and human affairs are governed. The seed, being sown, was left to vegetate; the leaven, being inserted, was left to ferment; and both according to the laws of nature: laws, nevertheless, disposed and controlled by that Providence which conducts the affairs of the universe, though by an influence inscrutable, and generally undistinguishable by us. And in this, Christianity is analogous to most other provisions for happiness. The provision is made; and, being made, is left to act according to laws, which, forming a part of a more general system, regulate this particular subject, in common with many others.

Let the constant recurrence to our observation of contrivance, design, and wisdom, in the works of nature, once fix upon our minds the belief of a God, and after that all is easy. In the counsels of a being possessed of the power and disposition which the Creator of the universe must possess, it

is not improbable that there should be a future state; it is not improbable that we should be acquainted with it. A future state rectifies every thing; because, if moral agents be made, in the last event, happy or miserable, according to their conduct in the station and under the circumstances in which they are placed, it seems not very material by the operation of what causes, according to what rules, or even, if you please to call it so, by what chance or caprice, these stations are assigned, or these circumstances determined. This hypothesis, therefore, solves all that objection to the divine care and goodness, which the promiscuous distribution of good and evil (I do not mean in the doubtful advantages of riches and grandeur, but in the unquestionably important distinctions of health and sickness, strength and infirmity, bodily ease and pain, mental alacrity and depression) is apt on so many occasions to create. This one truth changes the nature of things; gives order to confusion; makes the moral world of a piece with the natural.

Nevertheless, a higher degree of assurance than that to which it is possible to advance this, or any argument drawn from the light of nature, was necessary, especially to overcome the shock which the imagination and the senses receive from the effects and the appearances of death, and the obstruction which thence arises to the expectation of either a continued or a future existence. This difficulty, although of a nature, no doubt, to act very forcibly, will be found, I think, upon reflection, to reside more in our habits of apprehension, than in the subject; and that the giving way to it, when we have any reasonable grounds for the contrary, is rather an indulging of the imagination, than any thing else. Abstractedly considered, that is, considered without relation to the difference which habit, and merely habit, produces in our faculties and modes of apprehension, I do not see any thing more in the resurrection of a dead man, than in the conception of a child; except it be this, that the one comes into his world with a system of prior consciousnesses

about him, which the other does not: and no person will say, that he knows enough of either subject to perceive, that this circumstance makes such a difference in the two cases, that the one should be easy, and the other impossible; the one natural, the other not so. To the first man, the succession of the species would be as incomprehensible, as the resurrection of the dead is to us.

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact: the individuality of a mind is hardly consistent with the divisibility of an extended substance; or its volition, that is, its power of originating motion, with the inertness which cleaves to every portion of matter which our observation or our experiments can reach. These distinctions lead us to an *immaterial* principle: at least, they do this; they so negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the constitution of a sentient, still more of a rational, being, that no argument drawn from these properties, can be of any great weight in opposition to other reasons, when

the question respects the changes of which such a nature is capable, or the manner in which these changes are effected. Whatever thought be, or whatever it depend upon, the regular experience of *sleep* makes one thing concerning it certain, that it can be completely suspended, and completely restored.

If any one find it too great a strain upon his thoughts, to admit the notion of a substance strictly immaterial, that is, from which extension and solidity are excluded, he can find no difficulty in allowing, that a particle as small as a particle of light, minuter than all conceivable dimensions, may just as easily be the depositary, the organ, and the vehicle of consciousness, as the congeries of animal substance which forms a human body, or the human brain; that, being so, it may transfer a proper identity to whatever shall hereafter be united to it; may be safe amidst the destruction of its integuments; may connect the natural with the spiritual, the corruptible with the glorified body. If it be said, that the mode

and means of all this is imperceptible by our senses, it is only what is true of the most important agencies and operations. The great powers of nature are all invisible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetism, though constantly present, and constantly exerting their influence; though within us, near us, and about us; though diffused throughout all space, overspreading the surface, or penetrating the contexture, of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend upon substances and actions which are totally concealed from our senses. The Supreme Intelligence is so himself.

But whether these or any other attempts to satisfy the imagination, bear any resemblance to the truth, or whether the imagination, which, as I have said before, is the mere slave of habit, *can* be satisfied or not; when a future state, and the revelation of a future state, is not only perfectly consistent with the attributes of the Being who governs the universe; but when it is more; when it alone removes the appearances of contrariety which attend the operations of

his will towards creatures capable of comparative merit and demerit, of reward and punishment; when a strong body of historical evidence, confirmed by many internal tokens of truth and authenticity, gives us just reason to believe that such a revelation hath actually been made; we ought to set our minds at rest with the assurance, that in the resources of Creative Wisdom, expedients cannot be wanted to carry into effect what the Deity hath purposed: that either a new and mighty influence will descend upon the human world to resuscitate extinguished consciousness; or that, admidst the other wonderful contrivances with which the universe abounds, and by some of which we see animal life, in many instances, assuming improved forms of existence, acquiring new organs, new perceptions, and new sources of enjoyment, provision is also made, though by methods secret to us (as all the great processes of nature are), for conducting the objects of God's moral government, through the necessary changes of their frame, to those final distinctions of happiness and

misery, which he hath declared to be reserved for obedience and transgression, for virtue and vice, for the use and the neglect, the right and the wrong employment, of the faculties and opportunities with which he hath been pleased, severally, to intrust, and to try us.

THE END.

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